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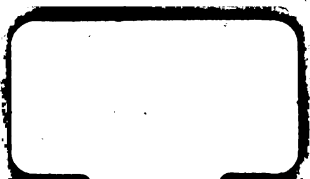
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A LITTLE IRISH GIRL.

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BY

THE "DUCHESS,"

AUTHOR OF "MOLLY BAWN," "PHYLLIS," "THE HONOURABLE
MRS. VEREKER," ETC., ETC.

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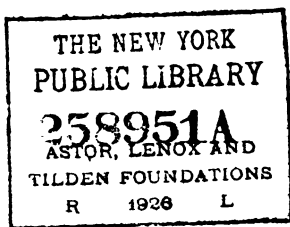
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OF NEW YORK

A LITTLE IRISH GIRL.

I.

"What is love? 'Tis not hereafter :
Present mirth hath present laughter.
What's to come is still unsure."

"BRIDGET! Bridget!" cries Bridget's young mistress, in a clear sweet tone. There is something of anxiety in it—enough to make the old woman to whom the name belongs hobble more swiftly from the kitchen to the sitting-room than is her usual custom.

"An' what is it, agra?" says she, stepping over the threshold, and looking up the big, bare room to where, in the third window, a tall, slight, childish figure is standing.

"Something dreadful, I'm certain. Come here! Come here!" beckoning hurriedly to the old woman, without taking her eyes off the window. "*Hurry*, can't you? Look out over *there*,"—pointing. "What is that? A man, eh?—a man hurt, wounded?"

"Faix, 'tis like that!" says the old woman, laying her hand to her brow, and staring into the growing darkness of the November evening.

"What can be the matter with him, Bridget?"

"I don't know, me dear. But he *do* look bad, whatever it is!"

"He shouldn't have come *this* way," says Miss McDermot anxiously. "You know those bogs down there, and those——
Oh, Bridget! did you *see*! He was nearly in then!"

"May the divil carry him!" says Bridget wrathfully, "whoever he is, for troublin' ye like this! An' may the heavens sind him sinse, to kape him for the future from searchin' for cowld mud baths at this sayson of the year."

"You never care a pin about anything, Bridget," says her young mistress, glancing angrily at her over her shoulder, "except——"

"*You*, me dear!" retorts the old woman promptly; whereupon both mistress and maid laugh in a subdued sort of way, as if a little afraid of being heard.

"'Pon me conscience! he'll be there all night, if the morning doesn't see him in the other world," says the old woman presently, who again has returned to her watching of the distant figure that is trying in an uncertain fashion to cross the morass. She is a rather handsome old woman, with masses of snow-white hair, that are but partly hidden beneath her still more snowy cap. Her dress is that of the ordinary Irish peasant, with a big white apron flowing over the skirt of the gown.

"Whoever he is," says Miss McDermot, peering over the old servant's shoulder through the parlour window, "he certainly knows nothing of the neighbourhood. Ours is about the most dangerous bog about here. Don't you think, Bridget, we ought to send some one to help him?"

"Unless ye mane *me*," says Mrs. Driscoll, whose Christian name is Bridget, "I don't know who ye can sind; as ye

know well enough yerself, miss (an' faix 'tis you've had cause to know it), the masther niver lets Patsy out ov his sight from mornin' till night. 'T would be ridic'lous to count on him. An' besides—— Glory be, miss! did ye see that? For a winged bird, he's a wondherful lepper."

Indeed, the man in the bog below seems (in spite of the fact that he is battling with an injured arm) extraordinarily full of life. The ill luck that has led him into this dangerous mass of water and spongy soil is not strong enough to destroy him: even as the two women, watching him breathlessly in the window of the gaunt old house, have almost given way to despair, he makes a last effort, and, landing on a firm bit of turf, jumps from that again to the firm land beyond.

That last effort seems, however, to have exhausted him. He staggers rather than walks towards the house. As he nears it, the girl, watching him, can see how ghastly is his face; and, flinging open the old-fashioned casement with an abrupt gesture, she springs down to the soft grass beneath, regardless of the old servant's remonstrances.

A few minutes brings her to the stranger's side.

"You are hurt, sir. You are faint. Lean on me. Oh! we watched you crossing that terrible bog, and at one time we feared—— But you are safe now. You will come in? Your arm, I fear, is——"

"Broken," says the young man, with a nervous smile.

"Oh! I *hope* not. Sprained, perhaps—but not *broken*. There!—are you easier now? Lean *heavier* on me; I don't mind it a bit; and—— Oh, *don't* faint! Oh, Patsy! Patsy!"—to the groom, gardener, boot-cleaner, man-of-all-

work, who comes hurrying up to her. "Catch him! He's awfully heavy."

Patsy catches him.

"Is he dead entirely, d'ye think, miss?"

"No: only fainted. There! Be *careful*! His arm, he says, is broken. There now! Oh! is that you, Bridget?" (to the old woman, who has hobbled out to her in a very angry frame of mind): "where can we put him, do you think? In the north room?"

"The hall will do him, I'm thinkin', till the docther till us where to sind him," says the old woman icily. With open unwillingness she lends a hand to convey the fainting man into the house.

Two or three chairs arranged in the hall make an improvised stretcher; but the unconscious man lying on them looks so miserably uncomfortable that the girl's heart dies within her.

"He *can't* stay there! Take him to the north room," she says sharply.

"Miss Dulcinea, don't do that!" says Bridget, compressing her lips, and regarding her young mistress with an anxious gaze. "'Tis unlucky enough that a half-dead crature should cross the threshold; but to take him in—to keep him—till death claims him, *that* will be bad, miss! I'm tellin' ye 'twill be for your undoin', miss."

"Nonsense!" says the girl scornfully. "What superstition! Besides, he is not going to die because his *arm* is broken. Patsy, give a hand here—to the north room, I tell you!"

"Miss Dulcie darlin', be sinsible now. I tell ye a hurt man brings no luck. An' yer father, darlin'—think ov him What'll *he* say?"

“The McDermot, whatever his faults, would not grudge hospitality to a fainting man.”

“Well, well! maybe. But look here now, my dearie! There’s Sir Ralph to be thought of! If he should hear of this.”

“*Let* him hear of it!” says the girl angrily. “Am I to study his wishes, even before I——?” she pauses as if to finish the sentence is distasteful to her, and a frown contracts her exquisite, low, broad, Greek brow. “I’m *tired* of hearing of Sir Ralph!” says she a second later, in a clear, ringing, wrathful tone.

A tone loud enough to reach the ears of the foremost of two men who now enter the hall by the lower door.

II.

“O sweet Fancy!—Let her loose;
Everything is spoilt by use.”

“There is a garden in her face.”

HE is a tall man, between thirty and thirty-two years, but looking considerably older. Not a handsome man,—not even a commonly good-looking one. A more decidedly plain man in a well-bred way than Ralph Anketell it would be difficult to find. That his large mouth is kindly and his small eyes earnest does little to redeem his face. But one thing at least he has: a magnificent figure. A better set up man than he, or one stronger or more vigorous, is hardly to be found in the Irish county to which he belongs.

Miss McDermot's last words have been quite clear to him, and being engaged to her he may be pardoned for not finding them exactly palatable. Beyond a swift glance at the girl, however, he takes no notice of them; and the glance goes astray, as she is looking at the prostrate figure on the chairs rather than at him,—a fact that comes home to Anketell with a little chill.

He had entered the big hall (beautiful even in its decay and disorder) by the lower door that leads to the garden, followed by Dulcinea's father. The latter—The McDermot

—is a spare, tall, gaunt man, with dull eyes covered by overhanging brows, and a most dogged mouth. Perhaps from him the girl has taken her obstinacy and hatred of control, if from the dead mother she has inherited the great love of truth and honour and the well of hidden affection that lives almost unsuspected within her breast.

“What is this? what is this?” demands her father, hurrying forward to where, in the dim growing of the autumn twilight, the silent figure lies.

Dulcinea, in a low tone, and with a slender hand uplifted, as if to insure quiet for the wounded man, tells her tale.

The whole scene makes a picture, hardly to be forgotten if once seen—as once seen it was!

The soft, grey, dying light, that scarcely lights up the grand old hall; the central figure prone, inanimate; the old woman *there*, with her white hair and cap and scornful air; the bending figure of the man-servant; and *here*, where the lights from the eastern window fall full upon her, the proud, slight figure of the girl, drawn to its fullest height, and with the lovely face uplifted. The rays from the departing sun fall with a wintry rapture on her nut-brown hair, lighting it in parts to gold. She is looking stirred, anxious; she is leaning a little forward towards her father; and her eyes—*such eyes!* blue, deep, heavenly blue; blue, like the ocean when it dreams of storm—are turned expectantly to his. Her lips are parted. And in the background, the two still figures—the father’s and the lover’s—both silent, wondering.

“He is ill, father; he will die if moved,” says the girl, in soft tones fraught with fear.

“He?—who is he?” asks The McDermot suspiciously.

"Ah! of that we know nothing." Her hand is still uplifted. "But Bridget says he is to rest there—*there!*" with a swift gesture towards the comfortable lounge, "until the doctor comes."

"Certainly *not!*" says The McDermot, taking a step forward. "*There!* Here, Patsy, what are you about? Carry this stranger to—where, Dulcie?"

"The north room is the warmest. It has been prepared for Andy; but he may not come," says Miss McDermot. And even if he does—Take *care*, Patsy. *Father!* his arm is broken."

She runs to the body they are lifting, and thrusts her own young firm arm under it, where the broken limb hangs helpless.

She is a second later a little surprised at finding herself thrust gently if somewhat unceremoniously aside.

"This is a man's work, not a woman's," says Sir Ralph curtly, if courteously. "You must try to forgive me if you find me in the way."

"Who is he, do you think, Bridget?" asks Miss McDermot half an hour later of her henchwoman, when she has soothed down that angry despot to a proper frame of mind.

"How can I tell, hinny? He may be the Divil himself for aught I know; an' fey, I wouldn't wondher. Who but the ould boy could come through that bog alive? What did he mane at all, I wondher, by comin' this way? Was there no one to warn him? or hadn't he an eye in his own head? But what's the good of an eye wid them English? Why, they haven't a grain o' sinse between them."

"You think he's English?"—eagerly.

"Couldn't ye see that much in the cock o' his nose? Faix, ye're near as blind as he is himself if ye couldn't note that much; and the strange twist o' his tongue. Och! English, sure!"

"I don't think he looks English! He is so dark. Did you notice that? And from *where* is he? *What* is he?"

"One o' thim young gentlemen up at Ballybeg, I'm thinkin'. Two of 'em come last night, as I'm towld by Larry Murphy, the cab-driver. You know him, miss?"

"No—no," dreamily. "Not at all."

"What! Not Larry the Thief? Arrah, what ails ye at all, me dear?"

"Oh, *Larry*? Oh! of *course*," blushing furiously. "I thought you were talking of—of——"

"Well, I wasn't," says the old woman drily. "I wouldn't presume to let me tongue run a race about them English folk."

"You really think the poor man we rescued was—is—an Englishman?"

"Sorra doubt of it! Bad scran to the day we saw him. Ye'll see now, miss, 'twill bring us no luck. An' naught but a wandherin' artist, I'd bet me life! The ould Lord above there, is cracked on fools o' that kind, I'm towld."

"Why should artists be fools?" asks Dulcinea, perhaps a little coldly.

"Well, for one thing, they niver has a penny to their name."

"We haven't a penny either," says the girl, with a superb straightening of her lovely figure. "Are *we* fools?"

"More or less," says Mrs. Driscoll, serenely,—“yer father any way! What's he bin doin' wid the property all these

years? Makin' ducks and dhakes o' it. However," says the old woman, "let McDermot do what he *like*. It's not of the likes of him I'd dare spake the unkind word; but thim others!" with a contemptuous sniff. "What's thim? *Nothin'!* People as go thravellin' here an' there through the counthry, an' niver a roof to their heads, or a grandfather to their portion. A McDermot shouldn't be named in the same day wid *thim*, penny or no penny."

"Ah! the pennies count, Bridget," says the girl, with a quick but heavy sigh.

"Wid them that are risin', but not wid the ould stock," says the old woman eagerly. "A McDermot poor is the same as a McDermot rich."

"No, no," shaking her head sadly.

"Ye say *that*? The more shame to thim as makes ye feel it!" cries the old woman fiercely, her lips quivering. "How dare any one forget the days, no so long distant ayther, when this ould house was the best in the County Cork, and when the McDermots could shake their fists in the faces of all their enemies?"

"I suppose we could do that now," says Dulcinea, laughing in spite of herself. Then, going back to her former mood, "Well, that's all over, Bridget," says she impatiently. "The end of the McDermots has come. Father, as you know, is the last of them."

"No, I don't. There's you! there's *you*!" cries the old woman hastily.

"A melancholy specimen," says the girl, with a rather sad laugh. "I'm afraid I should never summon up enough courage to shake my fist at anybody."

"There's *one* at whom you shake it often enough," says

the old woman reproachfully. "Take care ye don't do it once too often."

"Would the consequences" (saucily) "be so disastrous, then?"

"Ah! now, me dear! ye know betther about that than *I* could tell ye!"

"Who could tell me if you couldn't?"—purposely misunderstanding her. "And do I shake my fist at *you*, Bridget? And when I do it once too often, what" (mischievously) "will you do to me then, eh?"

"Ah, you will have your joke, alanna! I know that, whatever comes o' it. But don't go too far wid Sir Ralph, miss; be careful, I'm tellin ye. He's none o' yer soft sort. He——"

"Oh, bother Sir Ralph!" says the girl, turning with a little petulant gesture and walking away.

III.

“When a man is old
And the weather blows cold,
Well fare a fire and a furrèd gowne :
But when he is young
And his blood new sprung,
His sweetheart is wirth half the towne !”

IT is a month láter, and now very close to Christmas. Soft wreaths of snow hang upon every bough. Nature has spread herself a mantle so white, so chill, that scarce one dares to dream of life beneath it. In the old house, if nothing else is plentiful, fires are. To The McDermot warmth is gold—and so much gold he grants himself if in other ways he is compelled to study strict economy. Something in the brilliant glare of the huge pine logs lying on the massive lumps of glowing coal remind him in a measure of the days gone by, when he could hold up his head with the best, and keep open house for all his friends.

A whole month ! Thirty full days, and still the young man who had been brought in fainting to the old castle of the McDermots is the McDermot's guest. The doctor, summoned in haste, had pronounced him in a highly feverish state, and unfit for removal. He had broken his arm out shooting, in some unaccountable fashion ; and the walking for miles afterwards, trying in vain to find a short cut to Ballybeg, the residence of Lord Begmore, with

whom he was staying, and the subsequent immersion in the castle bog, and his exertions to escape from it, all had combined to render him as weak a creature as nature ever kept life in. To remove him had been impossible.

The McDermot, to whose sins inhospitality certainly never could be laid, had made his guest as welcome as possible. Lord Begmore, too, whose guest the young man was, had been assiduous in his attentions, calling every other day at first, and to the present moment sending flowers, fruit and game. These last were a godsend to Bridget and Dulcinea, who, with the short purse they held for housekeeping expenses, would hardly have known how to keep their guest in the little delicacies needful for an invalid without this help.

And after all he has not proved an artist ! He has never “wandhered” in the sense Bridget had suggested ; and certainly he has always had a grandfather and a roof over his head. In effect, he is a young man of family, and next heir to a title, his father being dead, and he an only son, and his grandfather Lord Branscombe. So there certainly is no doubt about the *grandfather*.

His name is Lucien Eyre, and his appearance beyond argument. A better featured man it would be perhaps difficult to find. Miss McDermot came to this conclusion early in his stay with her ; and even now, when he is mending, and one need not feel so altogether sentimental about him as when he lay stretched upon his bed, hovering between beautiful life and hideous death, she sees no cause to alter her decision. As a fact, he is distinctly handsome—of the dark Italian type one sometimes sees in English people. And at all events his free laughing mouth,

and the tall muscular figure he possesses, are essentially English.

Yesterday he was well enough to be moved down to one of the lower rooms,—a rather gaunt, impossible room, that had once been a schoolroom, to judge by the general break-up of the furniture. Miss McDermot had wished him to be brought to the drawing-room, the one decently if poorly kept-up room in the house ; but he had begged to be taken to some other place, where the advent of visitors need not disturb him. So the old schoolroom had been requisitioned, and a comfortable chair put into it, next to a roaring fire.

“Well, how do you feel?” asks Dulcinea, coming into the room like a young spring breeze, all life and freshness. “Tired—eh?”

She used to be afraid of him at first, when she learned he was so near to a title,—afraid of the poverty of her own surroundings, that *must* be felt by him so long as he was her father's guest ; but he had proved so bright and so gay, and so grateful for even the smallest mercies, that her heart had gone out to him. Even the difficult Bridget had been conquered—in a measure !

She has stepped into the light of the jovial fire, and is looking down at him with a little smile. He, from the depths of the ancient arm-chair, smiles back at her.

“I'm a swindle !” says he. “I feel as well as any fellow, only——”

“Only what?”

“Only I don't want to go,” says he, in a low tone, but boldly.

“How *good* of you that is !” says she, slipping into a chair at the other side of the glowing hearth, and spreading out

her pretty white fingers to the blaze. "Just *pretending*—to please me—that we have made you comfortable. Well," (with a sigh), "we've done our best, father and I; but it hasn't been *much*. I know that."

The firelight has fallen on her face; she is leaning towards it, and the rays, catching her blue eyes, light them up until they gleam like sapphires.

"I am not pretending," says the young man, leaning towards *her*. "And——" he paused. "Have you understood me?"

"Hm?" says she, using the light soft questioning sound that belongs to her, and that has often struck him as being so delightful.

"No, you have *not* understood," says he now. "Dulcie, don't you know why I don't want to leave?—why I would rather be an invalid *for ever* than leave? Don't you—*don't* you know?"

"No," says she, shrinking from him a little, and growing pale beneath the firelight.

"Oh, you *must* know!" says he, vehemently. "For a whole *week* I have believed you knew. Last Monday, when you brought me those Christmas roses, . . . and I took them, . . . and you . . . you blushed; . . . and, Dulcie——"

He breaks off suddenly, and rising to his feet comes over to her. "Dulcie, I love you."

"Oh no! *Oh no!*" cries she sharply, rising in turn, and drawing back from him. "You must not. You cannot. Don't you *know* about me?"

"Know about you?"

"Yes. No man must love me," says the girl, putting out both her hands, as if in renunciation of all affections.

"But why? *Darling*, why?"

"Because I am engaged to be married," returns she, with terrible solemnity.

Being a young man of the world, this declaration might, on another occasion, have given him food for mirth; being, however, a young man of the world for once honestly in love, it only gives him food for consternation.

"Engaged!" is all he can say.

"Yes! yes! Indeed!" hanging her head.

There is so little joy in her announcement—so little of anything but grief in the hanging of her dainty little head, that grand courage comes to him.

"An engagement! What is that?" cries he eagerly. "An engagement can be broken. Blessed thought! Now, if you had been *married*—though even so—well; but an engagement!"

"Ah! you don't know," says she. "*This* one can't be broken."

"Why not? And—who——? Oh, Dulcie! I think you might have told me, before, *something* about it."

"It didn't occur to me," says Dulcie, opening her fingers in her little explanatory way. "Never! not for a moment."

"What didn't?" in a puzzled tone,—“your engagement? But really you *must* have thought about that sometimes, any way; and, besides——”

"That! Nonsense," says she. "What didn't occur to me was, that you were—were——" she glances at him shyly and shamefacedly, "well—WERE—you know."

"Dulcie!" cries he.

"Oh no!" cries she. "Don't touch me. It is so absurd. You *couldn't* be in love with me in a month, could you?"

"*Couldn't I?*" says he.

"Well, even if you could," says she, shaking her head dismally, "it isn't of any use. Father has made up his mind I am to marry him."

"Who?"

"Sir Ralph Anketell."

"*Anketell?*"

"Yes."

"Why, he's twice your age."

"Oh no, he isn't!" says Miss McDermot quickly. "He is thirty-four."

"Looks more like ninety-four in my opinion, and as ugly as sin."

"I have read somewhere that sin is always beautiful," says she sententiously.

"Then Anketell is as ugly as something else. He" (gazing at her anxiously)—"he *is* ugly, isn't he?"

"I don't think he is so ugly as you think him," says she evasively.

"I believe you are in love with him," says Eyre, somewhat sulkily.

"You can believe what you like," returns she loftily.

Silence.

"Well, *are* you in love with him?" demands the young man presently, with open ire.

"I'm in love with nobody," retorts she, with crushing meaning; "but father thinks it will be a good thing for me to marry Sir Ralph."

"And he—Sir Ralph—does he know you are being coerced into a marriage with him?"

"I don't know what he knows."

W. L.—III.

"If he does he must be a *mean hound*!" cries Eyre, with passionate contempt.

"He is not a mean hound," says the girl quickly. "I may not want to marry him; I may have been persuaded to engage myself to him; I may not care for him in the very least: but he is *not* mean, and he is one of the kindest, best men I ever met."

"Well, never mind what I have said," puts in Eyre quickly. Her sudden defence of the man whom she so plainly does *not* love has struck him as a touch of nobility in her character. He can admire it the more as it seems to prove to him that love has no part in her defence. "The thing I *do* want to know, is—— *Dulcie*! look at me! Tell me you will try to love *me*."

"Why should I try to love you?" says she, tears rising in her eyes. "Why should I try to love any one? I tell you, I am bound to marry Sir Ralph, and—I must fulfil my promise."

"Surely not, if you yourself object to it."

"To what?"

"To the promise."

A pause.

"You *do* object to it?"

"I don't see that I have any right to object, the promise once given," says she restlessly. "But—I *do* for all that. It was father's doing. He thinks Sir Ralph perfection." She shrugs her shoulders, then suddenly turns to him: "*Fancy*!" says she vehemently—"Fancy a girl being told she must marry a man whether she likes him or not!"

"I can fancy a girl being told to do it. I can't fancy a girl *doing* it," returns he slowly.

"You mean——" (hotly).

"Never mind what I mean just now. You tell me it was your father's doing?"

"Yes."

"That is enough for me. But Anketell?"

"He knows nothing. He proposed to me through my father. I hated *that*"—rebelliously. "Why couldn't he have come to me direct?"

"Why indeed?"

"He said he was afraid, when I asked him," says the girl, with a frowning brow, and speaking as if addressing herself only. "But—*afraid!*"

"He must be a fool," says Eyre, with conviction; and might have said more perhaps, if the dark blue eyes had not suddenly raised themselves to his with a rather menacing expression in them. "Didn't he guess?" asks he hastily.

"What?—that I didn't love him? No. There was nothing to guess about."

"You didn't tell him?"

"I told him I had no love to give him," says Dulcinea.

"Well?"

"He asked me then if I loved *any one*."

"Well?"

"Well—I said I didn't."

"*Then!*" significantly.

"When he heard I didn't love any one he seemed quite contented."

"But, did it never occur to him that in the future you—er—you *might* love some one? Eh?"

"There is so seldom 'some one' here," returns she, with a sigh.

At this moment the door is thrown open.

"Miss Dulcinea!" says Mrs. Driscoll, appearing on the threshold in her best bib and tucker and her worst temper. "Sir Ralph wants to see ye. He's just ridden over from The Towers."

Behind her appears Sir Ralph.

"Well—here I am," says Dulcinea coldly. She rises with perfect calm, but in spite of herself a hot blush springs to her cheeks. She walks with a touch of defiance to the door.

"You want me, Sir Ralph?"

"Not here—not now," returns he, his tone ten times colder than her own. "If you will give me five minutes by-and-by in the drawing-room, it will do. Pray don't let me take you away from your guest now!" He pauses, and looking towards Eyre compels himself to be civil.

"Very glad to see you looking so much better," says he, with a ghost of a smile. (They have of course met during the past month.)

"Thanks," says Eyre, not too graciously.

"I can come now, if you want me," says Dulcinea, perceiving her betrothed turn to the doorway, as if to go away.

"Thank you! An hour hence will do very well," replies he coolly; and closes the door behind him.

"There!" says Dulcinea, looking at Eyre, with angry eyes full of tears; "what do you think of *that*? I'm sure I *offered* to go with him, didn't I? and you see how he treated me. You *saw* it, didn't you?"

"I saw it indeed. Dulcie, why think of him at all? Why *care*? He is beneath your notice."

“Oh ! he is more than that. He is a wretch. I *hate* him !” cries Dulcie vehemently. She stamps her small foot upon the ground, and then suddenly, for no such great reason certainly, she covers her face with her hands and bursts into a storm of tears.

IV.

"O Mistress mine, where are you roaming?
O stay and hear!—Your true love's coming
That can sing both high and low:
Trip no further, pretty sweeting."

IT is in a distinctly aggressive mood that she goes to the drawing-room an hour later, to keep her appointment with Sir Ralph. She finds him there, lounging in a big chair, with his hands clasped behind his head, gazing moodily into the fire. There is a frown upon his brow that he does not attempt to get rid of, as he gets slowly on to his feet to receive her.

"You did not trouble yourself to hurry," says he unpleasantly.

"You gave me the impression that any time would do," retorts she, with a little shrug of her pretty shoulders.

"No time would have suited you, I daresay," says he bitterly.

"Much better, if you are going to be in a bad temper," with a touch of temper on her own part.

Anketell looks at her intently for a moment. There is a curious light in his eyes—a quick fire. He even moves his lips as if he would have spoken, but by a strong effort controls himself.

"Is my temper the only thing against me?" asks he

presently, with a smile that, if still resentful, is also very sad.

"I have made no complaint," returns she icily.

"Then I wish you *would*!" cries he fiercely, his late control flung to the winds, and a very storm of passion shaking him. "*What!* do you think I am a stone, or a fool, that I can't see how you treat me? *Find* your fault! State it! Let me *see* where I fail!"

"If," says Miss McDermot, laying her hand on the back of the chair nearest her,—“if it was to—to *roar* at me you asked me to meet you here, I think you would have done better to reserve your invitation.”

She is very pale as she thus defies him, but her lovely head is well thrown up, and battle declares itself in every feature.

"Well—I beg your pardon," says Anketell, with the air of a man who, finding the matter hopeless, gives in. "Let us—'grimly'—presume I have *no* fault."

"By all means," acquiesces she demurely.

"There were some papers to be signed with regard to our marriage," says he: "that was why I asked you to come here; but you delayed so long that——"

"Well—what?"

"I fancied you were very happy where you were, and so I would not have you disturbed. I told your father I could come again to-morrow, and so could the solicitor. You see," satirically, "I have always your interests at heart."

"You are too good!" returns she, with a satire of her own—so fine, that his sinks into insignificance. Then, quite suddenly, she turns to him, and crossing the room, reaches

the hearthrug on which he is standing. "What is it all about?" asks she, with a change from finesse to utter straightforwardness. "Something has vexed you. What?"

"Ah! *so* much you have troubled yourself to discover," says he, with a harshness that she is clever enough to know is born of grief. "*Something!* How many things? I wonder. My life for the past month has been a hell. Because I don't say much, you think I cannot feel at all. What do you think I felt on that first cursed evening, when that fellow came beneath your roof—when you told old Bridget that you were '*tired* of hearing of Sir Ralph'?"

She is standing opposite to him, with the firelight illuminating her face. A little quick shiver seems to pass over her; but beyond that she makes no sign.

"I suppose you mean—that you wish—to break—our engagement," says she, her voice coming from her in little broken pieces.

"That! No. That is the last thing I should mean."

"And yet, if you believe me *tired* of you, surely you would wish to——"

"I should *not*"—(coldly).

"Not even then? Tired of you! You *heard* me say that, and still——"

"I shall never break off my engagement with you," says he slowly. "Never! I shall leave the breaking of our engagement to you."

"You mean," says she, in a little choking voice, "that you will leave all the odium of it upon me?"

"I mean that I shall never break with you until you break with me."

"You are a *tyrant*!" cries she suddenly. "You don't care for me, yet you will hold me in spite of me!"

"Is that your reading of it?"

"Yes, that is what I think—what I *honestly* think. Do you know" (looking straight up at him, her charming angry face brilliant with emotion), "I believe that in your heart you *hate* me, and that the punishment you have laid out for me is to marry me!"

"Is that what you think, *Dulcinea*?" A step takes him to her, and a moment gives him time to catch her firmly by both arms, and so hold her that he can compel her to meet his gaze. "You think that of me? And why? *Why?* Look here!" (with sudden passion), "how *dare* you so think of me? You! whose sole delight seems to be to ruin an honest man's happiness, how dare you so misjudge me? There!" (releasing her). "Go! I am a *fool* to suffer as I do."

He thrusts her from him, and, walking towards the window, flings it up, and steps into the growing night.

V.

"Thou didst delight mine ear ;
Ah ! little praise : thy voice
Makes other hearts rejoice,
Makes all ears glad that hear."

MISS McDERMOT, thus abandoned, stands for a full minute motionless. Doubtless her *first* feeling is astonishment, in that this heretofore abject love of hers has now proved so masterful. But the next is rage—pure and simple.

To treat her like *that* ! *He* ! Ralph ! who had been so humbly glad when she had fallen in with her father's views about him, and *permitted* him to be engaged to her. The world must be coming to an end !

She is staring through the window that has seen him depart. Her hands are hanging by her sides. Her tall, slight figure has grown rigid.

The world *must* be coming to an end ; but *whose* world ? His, or hers ? Who is to fail in this encounter ? Which of them will be counted amongst the slain ?

Not she, at all events. Despite the wild throbbing in her throat, she commands herself so far as to forbid the tears that are struggling for an opening. He may still be there—out there in the chill of the exquisite early night, and he might see.

He! Tyrant! And to this man her father has given her! A man, who, on the smallest provocation, has showered insult upon insult on her head. Well, he shall *see*! Father or no father, she will never marry him! Oh, he shall *see*!

She grinds her little lovely white teeth together, and with a last defiant glance at the window leaves the room.

In the hall she checks herself. An idea—a thought of vengeance has occurred to her. This other—this stranger: *he* loves her, at all events. In him lies a chance of rescue! Rescue from marriage with this detestable man, who has told her so many horrible things all about herself, and all, naturally, untrue.

She opens the door of the old schoolroom, and enters it with a vehemence that can hardly be misunderstood.

"Something has happened," says Eyre, getting on to his feet with some difficulty. "What is it, Dulcie?"

"Oh, he has behaved abominably," says she, her eyes flashing. "He said the most *cruel* things."

"Never mind him, darling. Come and sit down by me, and let us try to find a way out of our difficulties."

"But I *must* mind him!" cries she indignantly. "Why, I can't *tell* you all he said."

"I'm so glad of that," puts he in soothingly.

"But I must tell you for all that" (with charming inconsistency). "I remember every word. They seem burned into my brain. Oh! he was so rude! *Fancy* his telling me I had ruined his life!"

"It seems to me that he is trying to ruin yours."

"Mine?" She gazes at him a moment, as if not quite understanding this, and then: "You don't understand,"

says she. "How could he ruin mine? But never mind that,—that's folly! Just hear the other dreadful things he said. He began by telling me——"

"Dulcie!"—he checks her by a waving hand.—"After all, you know, he can't have wanted *me* to hear him. We needn't go into details, need we? It is enough for me to know that he has been—well—beastly to you."

"Beastly! he hasn't been *that*," says she, with quite unexpected fervour. "*Beastly* is a vulgar word. He has been *horrid*. I" (with a decision that carries a frown with it) "don't deny that; but he has *never* been beastly!"

"You are a generous foe," says Eyre, smiling. Her generosity, indeed, strikes him as being something out of the way, something beyond words—charming. It would have been so *easy* to her to abuse this troublesome—this so evidently undesired lover. And yet she cannot bring herself in her integrity to deny any small virtue he may possess. "Well, then, we will let him slide if you like; no use talking about a low sort of hound like that."

"What abominable language you use!" says she. "Even if Sir Ralph has behaved unkindly to me, I don't see why you, a *stranger*, should call him a—a—er—bad names."

"You are quite right, and I am wrong," says Eyre, giving in delightfully. "But surely—*now*, after all you have told me, you don't still feel bound in duty's chains to marry that disagreeable person."

"*Certainly* not," says she, with a firm compression of her mouth. "If there is one thing on earth about which I have *quite* made up my mind, it is that I shall never marry Sir Ralph."

"And a good thing too," says he. "You mean it?"

"Can't you *see* that I mean it?" turning to him an extremely pale and unhappy face.

"I can't," says he, gazing at her regretfully. "I can see only one thing, and that is that you are unhappy."

"Of course I'm unhappy, after the scolding I have just undergone. Why, *father* never scolded me as he did!"

"Can't you forget him?" says Eyre imploringly.

"I can't. It is very hard to forget the people one *hates*. However, whether I forget or remember him, my mind is made up: I shall never marry him."

"Marry me instead!" says Eyre boldly.

"You?" It would be impossible to describe the amount of astonishment she has thrown into this word.

"Yes. Why not? You know—I have told you—how I love you. Give yourself to me. Let me rescue you from this tyranny that is oppressing and destroying your life."

"'Tyranny!'" repeats she, as if struck by the word. "Yes, he *is* a tyrant, isn't he?"

"Oh, never mind him. By all accounts he's not worth a thought," says Mr. Eyre, with sovereign contempt.

"Whose accounts?"

"Yours."

"*Mine?*"

"Well, haven't you abused him to me? Haven't you had cause to do so?"

"Oh, *cause!*" says she. She grows silent, and stands near him with gaze bent upon the ground and brows drawn together. Suddenly she looks up at him, and he can see that her eyes are full of tears.

"Dulcie," cries he impulsively, "you are unhappy. Why should any one be unhappy? We have so short a time

to live that it is folly not to make the best of every hour of it. Forget all this. Throw up your engagement, and marry me."

"Oh!" (faintly), "I couldn't."

"What! Will you stay here, then, and marry that man?"

"Never! *Never!*"

"Why not let him see at once, then, that he has no power over you—that his impertinent lecturing can be directed at somebody else, not at you?"

"I should like to let him know that, *certainly*," says she, her eyes flashing vindictively.

"Let me speak to your father, then."

"He—would be so angry," says she hesitatingly. "And" (quickly) "it would be of no use either."

"You look as if you were glad of that."

"Why should I look glad? I'm not glad about anything," says she sadly,—so sadly that he forgets his suspicion of her, and goes back to his first thought.

"Let me try your father, at all events. Let me tell him how miserable you are: that you can't bear to marry Anketell, and——"

"You may certainly tell him *that!*"—vehemently. "I shall never marry Sir Ralph, not if he lived to be a thousand years old."

"I *may* try your father, then? You authorise me?"

"Yes"—slowly—"you can try."

"Dulcie!" says he quickly, "do you know what that permission means? *Do* you, darling?"

He has caught her hand, and would have drawn her to him, but something in her face, something thoughtful, *troubled*, prevents him.

"Let me tell you something," says she: "that, though we are engaged, Sir Ralph never once called me that."

"Called you what?"

"Darling."

"Oh, he's a fool!" says Mr. Eyre, with conviction. "But do you understand, darling? If I speak to your father with your permission, it means that, if I succeed with him, you will marry me."

"Does it?" says she, with a sigh. "Well," sinking into a chair, and clasping her knees with her slim fingers, "you *won't* succeed: father will never give in."

"It certainly couldn't if I were Anketell's inferior,"* says the young man judiciously; "but my prospects are as good as his any day."

"I don't care about prospects," says Miss McDermot: "what I want is to feel *free*. I can't bear being ordered to do things. You said you could imagine a girl being told to marry a man, but that you could not imagine a girl *doing* it. You remember?"

"Against her *will*."

"Oh! that's the same thing," says she. "If she wanted to marry him, she wouldn't want to be ordered to do it."

"True," says he.

"To be ordered to do a thing is at once to want *not* to do it. That is true also, isn't it?" says she.

"Nothing truer."

"Well, you thought me weak and detestable when I told you I had promised to marry Sir Ralph."

"I thought then"—distinctly—"just what I think now, that no woman should marry any man unless she loved

him. It is an injustice both to him and to herself; and you—you don't care for Anketell."

"I have told you that I *hate* him," says she, making no direct answer; "but if I were to break with him! You" (lifting her eyes to his)—"you don't know father: he—I don't really know *what* would happen, if he heard I did not want to marry Sir Ralph."

"Why, your marriage with me,—that is the first thing that would happen"—with a smile. He takes her hands and carries them to his lips. "I love you. You know that, Dulcie, don't you? You *do* know it?"

"Oh yes! I know it," says she, with a quick, long sigh, and a droop of her pretty head.

This calm acknowledgment of his passion for her, strikes Eyre with a sort of shock. Involuntarily he glances at her; and examination of that lovely face disarms unkind criticism. The poor child is so unhappy that she has forgotten to dissemble. Girls of the sort he has been accustomed to meet in town and fashionable country houses, would have pretended to doubt his love with a view to stronger expression of it; but this poor little girl is too hardly pressed by circumstances, and is too altogether a child of Nature, to hide her honest beliefs. So much the better. And what a charming little head it is, bent like that, with the soft, sunny, nut-brown curls wandering over the broad forehead, and the delicate contour of cheek and chin laid bare! What one amongst all those polished women of the world of whom he has just now thought, could compare in grace and breeding with this sweet perfect flower of country growth?

"I may speak to your father, then?" says he.

"Eh?" says she, as if rousing out of a reverie; and then, "Yes, yes!"—feverishly—"do. The sooner I can feel that he and I are separated *for ever*—the better." This outburst, incoherent as it is, has evidently something to do with the reverie into which she had fallen.

"You mean Anketell?" says Eyre, watching her.

"Yes," nodding her head with determination; "I have been thinking, and it seems to me he wants me quite as little as I want *him*. Let him go, then."

"By all means."

"You think"—anxiously—"as *I* do, don't you?—that he doesn't care for me either?"

"I have never thought about him. If you thought of him as little as I do, it would be better for you."

"Ah! yes. But I have told you how *hard* it is not to let the mind dwell on the people who torment one most." She stops and looks searchingly at him. "Do you know," says she slowly, "I have come to the conviction that he *hates me*."

"He's brute enough for anything, in my opinion."

"And that he would be *glad* to know our engagement at an end."

"Why, if so," says he joyously, "our task is half accomplished. Why not let me speak to him, in a casual sort of way, you know, not *mentioning* anything exactly, but——"

"No, I forbid you to do that!" says she, almost fiercely. "Speak to father if you will, but *not* to him."

"I see. I am sorry, darling, I suggested it. Of course you would not care to appeal to him in any way. Not that I meant anything like appealing: I thought only of giving him a loophole of escape."

W. L.—III.

"Escape?"

"From this foolish engagement between you and him, where love has no part on either side."

"Oh! I see," says she, and bursts out laughing. Such curious laughter!—laughter so extreme that it brings tears to her eyes. "You think he would be glad of a chance to find himself free again?"

"I guess so much from what you have told me, and the sourness of his expression, whenever I have seen you with him."

"You have guessed rightly," says she, standing up and looking down at him with parted lips and brilliant eyes. "I myself have noticed how changed he has been of late. He *is* tired—tired of me." She laughs again: it is the strangest little laugh. "Fancy two people wanting to get rid of each other, and not knowing how to do it! But I shall help him,—I shall let him go free."

"To-morrow, then, I shall speak to your father."

"To-morrow? Must you put it off till to-morrow?" She has grown as anxious now for him to interview her father as she had been frightened about it before. "Well—and say everything. Everything you can about my—my *dislike* to Sir Ralph. You might even call it hatred. You know I told you I hated him. Yes, say I *hate* him."

"I'll say all I know," says Eyre fervently. "You may be sure I sha'n't let a single point be lost."

"I must go now," says she, rising. She is looking very pale and tired. "There are some things I must attend to. I sha'n't see you again to-night."

"Not to-night! Why, it is only six o'clock now!"

"Six o'clock! Is it really so late? Time for all invalids to be in bed," says she, smiling, though half-heartedly.

"I expect you will be glad to get rid of me," says he, smiling in turn, and by no means believing in his words.

"No," returns she, shaking her head.

"That is well, because, as things stand, you are not likely ever to get rid of me. But—— What a hurry you are in, Dulcie! I suppose if the doctor is to be relied on, I shall be able to move by the end of the week?"

"You mustn't hurry yourself; you must be careful not to undo all the good work he has done," says she kindly, hospitably. "And, to begin with, you ought to be in bed now, surely. I shall send Patsy."

She moves to the door. Patsy, the factotum, has been in the habit, up to this, of helping Mr. Eyre from one room to another. At the door, however, she pauses, and looks back at him. Her eyes are troubled.

"You needn't be uneasy," says he lightly. "I'm all right: better than ever I was."

"Yes, I think you *do* look better," says she softly. "But there was something" (confusedly) "I wanted to say to you; and you have put it out of my head." She turns again to the door, hesitates again, and again looks back at him.

"By-the-bye, *did* I abuse him to you?" asks she.

"Him?—who? Oh! that fellow! Anketell?"

"Yes."

"Well, you did rather. Why?" He has crossed the room to her.

"Oh, nothing!" letting him take her hand and caress it; "only—it sounds horrid, doesn't it?"

"What does?"

"Why, horrid to abuse anybody. It isn't a *nice* thing to do—eh? Your other friends—the girls you know, I mean—who are in society, *they* wouldn't do it, would they?"

"Do what, darling?"

"Why, speak unkindly of people, even their enemies, openly."

"Oh, wouldn't they, though!" says Mr. Eyre, giving way to mirth. "My word, you don't know them! You should hear them sometimes, and" (with tender meaning, and a loving glance at her) "you shall some day, I hope; and believe me, they will open your eyes. The way they abuse their enemies is frightful—one is prepared for that: but the way they abuse their *friends*—*that's* a surprise, if you like!"

"I shouldn't like," says Dulcinea disparagingly.

"I know it. That's why I so love you," says he frankly. "Well, to-morrow, then, Dulcie," detaining her: "you give me leave to try my—*our*—luck to-morrow?"

"Yes." She pauses; and then "*Yes!*" again, with sudden vehemence. "Oh, how I should like to *show* him how independent I am of him."

"After all, it is hard to be independent of one's father," says Eyre.

Miss McDermot stares at him for a moment. *Her father!* Then she turns and runs away. It had seemed to her impossible to explain.

VI.

"I've a sweetheart blithe and gay,
Fairer far than fabled fay
Light and airy.
She is bright and débonnaire,
Softly falls her golden hair.
I all other loves forswear,
Little fairy !"

MR. EYRE, having brought himself to a thorough belief in Dulcinea's misery, dwells upon it. That she has been forced into an engagement with a most objectionable man by a mercenary father, seems to him the correct reading of her history so far. To alter that history seems to him also to be the work allotted to him. Her beauty has come home to him with a persistency that has dwarfed all other beauty remembered or imagined, and the plaintive face of his pretty hostess has wakened in his breast a chivalrous desire to hazard all fortunes in her cause. As a fact, he has fallen in love with her : if not very seriously, still seriously enough to make him ambitious of making her his wife. A considerable zest is added to his passion by the belief that he, and he alone, can save her from a "loveless union"—this is how *he* puts it—with another,—and that a most despicable creature, according to her account. The certainty that she is wearing her heart away

with grief—that joy is unknown to her—that she is fast growing into a state of mind that will produce consumption in the body—is somewhat rudely destroyed by her entrance into the old schoolroom next morning, shortly after his own descent into that time-honoured apartment.

“Oh! I’ve such news—such news!” cries she, rushing in and banging the door behind her with an emphasis that makes his nerves (still rather beyond his control) jump again.

It is evident she has run to him straight with her news, whatever it is. Her pretty hair is flying all over her head, her eyes are sparkling. Smiles wreath her charming lips. She is waving a telegram over her head. The very incarnation of joy and fresh young life might be painted from her as she stands there laughing, triumphant. She is looking lovely.

“A telegram from that fellow breaking off the engagement,” decides Eyre within himself. “It is settled, then?” says he quickly.

“Oh yes—a certainty *this* time!”

“Then I needn’t speak to your father?”

“To father?” (as if puzzled). “Oh, he knows of it! He will be glad too!”

“Your *father*?”

“Why, yes—yes—yes!” (almost dancing up to him). “Do you think that, because they have had a skirmish or two, father won’t be pleased to see him? I tell you he *is* pleased! And so will *you* be when you see my Andy!”

“Your *what*?” Mr. Eyre has retreated to his chair once more.

“Andy! He’s coming! Haven’t you understood? He’s coming *to-day*!”

"And who is Andy?" demands Mr. Eyre, feeling a trifle aggrieved. Of course, he tells himself, he is glad of anything that has lightened the burden that so hardly presses upon her. But that it should be—Andy! And such a very beloved Andy, to judge by appearances! What a name! Perhaps, after all, Andy is a girl: Andromeda—Andromache. Some people called their children by queer names, and Andy might be an abbreviation of either of these.

"Not know Andy?" cries Dulcinea, lifting her brows.

"A friend of yours?"

"Yes" (smiling).

"Evidently a nice girl?" hazards Mr. Eyre.

"A girl! Andy a *girl*!" Miss McDermot breaks into irrepressible laughter. "Oh, wait till he hears that! Why, he has just been gazetted to the 18th Hussars!"

"Ah!" (somewhat stiffly). "Brother, perhaps?"

"No. No, indeed. I" (as if by no means sorry for the fact) "have no brother. But Andy is better than any brother."

"Is he? As" (disagreeably) "you haven't had one, I don't quite see how you can know that."

"I've seen other girls, and heard what they said of theirs," says Dulcinea sagely.

"Then this Andy is——"

"My cousin. And *such* a nice one!" says Miss McDermot warmly. *Fancy* your not having heard of him! Well, when you see him, you'll know him all in a moment. He" (happily) "is *such* fun!"

"Is he?"

"Oh, wait—*wait*! By-the-bye" (bringing out her left

hand from behind her back), "I had nearly forgotten, but I found these, and I brought them to you. Violets! Smell them" (thrusting them under his nose). "Delicious, aren't they? I found them under the ivy wall. Andy and I planted them there last year."

"Andy and you seem to be great friends," says he in a gentler tone, taking her hand, violets and all, and holding it. Somehow it has come to him that this charming child is not in love with "Andy," however delightful that young gentleman may be.

"Oh, the best, the dearest! I don't disguise from you," says Miss McDermot, growing suddenly serious, "that at times we quarrel. We" (thoughtfully) "quarrel a good deal when together. But when Andy is *away* from me—ah! then I know what a perfect darling he is!"

"'Absence makes the heart grow fonder,'" murmurs Mr. Eyre, wisely refraining from a smile. "And Andy, how does he regard you?—*here*—and there?"

"'Here,' as I tell you," says she, with a fresh, delicious laugh, "he makes himself abominable now and then. But when he is '*there*,'—oh, then Andy loves me!"

"I should think you and he should always be '*there*,'" says her companion gravely.

"Well, I don't. I'm delighted he's coming. Bless me!" (glancing at the clock), "I've only half an hour to see about his sheets and things! and I don't believe Bridget has *thought* about lighting a fire in his room. There! Good-bye for a while. I must *run*. He'll *kill* me if he finds himself without a fire in his room!"

She rushes out of the room as she had entered it—like a heavenly spring wind that brings only joy to the receiver

of it. Eyre, staring after, feels a quick throb at his heart. What a delight she is! How different from most girls! And this cousin of hers—this Andy! No doubt he is a young Adonis; a “curled darling”—a creature half boy, half man, and wholly charming. But she is not in *love* with him. So much can be read by those who run.

* * * * *

When he *does* see Andy, which is three hours later, his astonishment knows no bounds. Andy is indeed a revelation! He is perhaps the ugliest young Irishman on record; and that is saying a good deal. As handsome as Irishwomen undoubtedly are, so in proportion are Irishmen hideous.

But his manners make up for a good deal. He is full of bonhomie, brimming over indeed with the milk of human kindness. In the course of the five minutes he is permitted to spend with Mr. Eyre, who is still considered an invalid, he fires off as many jokes as would have made a reasonable supply for a month with anybody else.

Having then said he felt he ought to go and present himself to The McDermot, who is his guardian, he beats a retreat, dragging Dulcie into the corridor outside as he goes.

“I say, he isn’t half a bad fellow; but he isn’t fit to hold a candle to Sir Ralph,” says he in a whisper, still clutching Dulcie by the arm.

“You know *my* opinion of Sir Ralph!” returns she, trying unavailingly to extricate herself from his grasp.

“Girls never have an opinion worth a ha’penny!” retorts he, letting her go with a disgusted grimace. Already one of the quarrels!

VII.

"Honour's a mistress all mankind pursue ;
Yet most mistake the false one for the true."

EYRE having received permission, and being anxious on his own part to bring matters to a climax, makes an early opportunity of requesting a private interview with his host. The time chosen is to-day. As wet a day as ever came out of the heavens, and the one after that on which Andy McDermot arrived.

There had been a hurried interview between Eyre and Dulcie in the morning, in which the girl had seemed down hearted and dispirited, and inclined to let matters stay as they were, bad as they undoubtedly must be considered ; but Eyre—fired with sorrow for her, and a determination to save her from the impending disaster that threatens her, namely, her marriage with that miscreant Anketell—had refused to listen to her fears, and is now standing outside The McDermot's private den, waiting for admission.

It is soon given.

The *den* is an awful agglomeration of things useful and useless—principally useless,—but beloved as having once belonged to better days than these. In the midst of the chaos sits The McDermot, calmly smoking a pipe that

could *never* have seen a better day than this, as it is now as black as black can be.

"Bless my soul, Mr. Eyre! *You*," says he, rising and pulling forward a chair for his guest,—“you sent me word, I now remember, that you wanted to see me. Feeling strong, eh?—better, eh? Have a brandy and soda?”

"No, thanks. No, I *assure* you. The fact is, I—I wanted to speak to you about your daughter."

"About—my daughter?" The McDermot lays down the decanter, and turns his eyes full on Eyre. "Well, and what about her?"

"It is a little difficult to explain to you; but—I have come to the conclusion that your daughter is not happy in the engagement she has contracted."

"Ah!" says The McDermot, wrinkling his brows. "Is that all? Don't you want to tell me you have fallen in love with Dulcinea—that she would be happier in an engagement with *you*? and therefore you think her coming marriage with Sir Ralph Anketell an iniquitous arrangement?"

"Not iniquitous so much as mistaken," says Eyre, keeping his temper admirably, under the other's ill-concealed sarcasm; "besides, *must* it come to marriage?"

"So I have been given to understand by both parties."

"Engagements have been broken before now."

"I dare say—I know nothing of that. I know only this, that my daughter's engagement with Sir Ralph Anketell shall *not* be broken."

"Not even if it were for her good?"

"How should it be for her good?"

"Happiness counts," says the younger man quickly.

"McDermot!" (earnestly), "I should not try to disarrange your views for your daughter, if I could not offer as much as I should cause her to lose. I can make settlements."

"No doubt, no doubt! That is matter, sir, for the lady you may choose to marry."

"Just so: that lady is your daughter."

"There you make a mistake, Mr. Eyre," says The McDermot distinctly. "You will never marry my daughter with my consent. With regard to her own consent, *that* is already forfeited. Her word is given to another. And one word, sir: permit me to say that as my guest you——"

"No, I shall *not* permit you!" interrupts Eyre passionately. "Is every sacred, earnest feeling to be ruled by society's laws? Your daughter is unhappy. Surely there are occasions when the best, the most honourable rules should be broken! And, knowing her unhappy——"

"You are eloquent, sir," says The McDermot, with a reserved smile. "Forgive me if I break in upon your admirable dissertation on the weak points of society. You say my daughter is unhappy. May I ask your authority for that speech?"

"Certainly!" (hotly). "She herself has said so!"

"Excellent authority indeed! My daughter" (grimly) "is evidently even a greater fool than I thought her!"

"You misjudge her," says the young man eagerly.

The McDermot lets his eyes rest on him for a moment. "I can follow *your* line of thought," says he slowly. "The woman who could appreciate you could be no fool—eh?"

"*Sir!*" says Eyre, frowning.

"But are you so *sure* of her affection? Is every young girl's first word worthy of credit?"

"I desire to keep to the point," says Eyre, a little haughtily. "I can offer your daughter a position. I, on my uncle's death, shall inherit a title. I can offer her quite as much as Sir Ralph can. I——"

"Sir!" interrupts The McDermot sternly, "if you could make her a *duchess*, I should still decline your proposal. My daughter has given her word to marry Sir Ralph Anketell, and by that word she shall abide!"

* * * * *

So it is all over, then—in *that* quarter, at all events. Eyre, having bowed himself out of his host's presence, after forcing himself, as in duty bound, to make courteous acknowledgment of hospitality received, which acknowledgment has been as courteously accepted, has sent a message to the village for a trap to take him and his belongings to the inn down there as soon as may be. He is raging with indignation and disgust. That old *Goth*! He will give his daughter to a man she hates just because in a foolish moment the poor girl had been coerced into an engagement with him. Never had the spirit of Don Quixote been so strongly reproduced as in Mr. Eyre's heart at this moment. He will come to her aid, father or no father! What! would *any* man stand still and see a girl wantonly, deliberately sacrificed, and not put out a hand to help—to save? If so, his name is not Lucien Eyre!

To see Dulcinea is, however, necessary. She must be made cognisant of the plot laid against her happiness. Up to this, poor child, she has regarded her engagement as a usual thing, if hateful; but she must now learn that *force* will be employed if she refuses to go calmly to the altar with that abomination, Sir Ralph.

He has only just stepped into the corridor when he comes face to face with her.

"Well, I've seen your father," says he.

"*What ! Oh, no !*" says she

"Yes, I have ; and a bigger old—— I beg your pardon. But——"

"He says I must hold to my engagement with Sir Ralph ?"

"He says that, and that only. If you were a slave, he could not have made it more distinct that you were without power in the matter."

"Surely" (growing very pale) "you exaggerate a little. A slave ! *Whose* slave ?"

"Sir Ralph's presently, if you don't take swift measures to free yourself. Dulcie, you trust me, don't you ? Come away with me. Come this evening. There is a train at half-past six ; meet me there, and——"

"And what ?"

"I'll take you up to town to my sister's, and we can be married to-morrow morning."

"Married to-morrow morning ! And—and he——"

"He !" (meaning her father : she, however, had *not* meant her father) ; "why, he deserves all he will get—no more."

"True, true !" says she, as if trying to work herself up to the necessary point of valour. "A slave, you said. But still——"

"Dulcinea ! Dulcinea !" roars some one in the distance. It is the voice of the "Goth" !

"He's calling me : I must go !" says she, taking her hand away from Eyre in a little frightened fashion.

"Remember," whispers he, holding her by her sleeve—"remember the train : the station is only a mile from this ;

6.30—keep it in mind. I shall be there. It is nothing of a walk, and——”

“But—my clothes!”

“Oh, nonsense! My sister will——”

“Dulcinea!” It is a very angry roar this time.

Dulcinea, with a wistful, undecided glance at Eyre, rushes down the passage that leads to her father’s sanctum, and disappears.

“You called me, father?” says she nervously.

“Called you! I should think so! Half a dozen times at least. What were you doing? Philandering with that thundering idiot upstairs, eh? I should think, considering his birth—and he comes of decent people enough, though they *are* English—that to make love to a girl in her father’s house without her father’s consent was a most damnably low sort of thing to do.”

“You wrong Mr. Eyre when you talk of him like that,” says Dulcinea loyally. Eyre had meant to befriend her. A ray of the fire that blazes within her father’s eyes shines in her own at this moment.

“Look here!” says The McDermot furiously: “you can fancy yourself in love with whom you like, but you shall marry Anketell, all the same. You’ve given your word to him and I’ll see that you keep it!”

“I shall not marry him unless I wish it,” says his daughter, with distinct defiance; whereupon The McDermot breaks out in a terrible way, and says all sorts of bitter, unpardonable things, until the girl, who is in a white heat of rage in her own way, flings wide the door and rushes into the garden, to find rest and peace, and room for thought.

She finds, however, only her cousin.

VIII.

"Is it not time, then, to be wise?—
Or now, or never."

PERHAPS to her it has seemed that "rest" and "peace" may be found in him. Fond hope!

"Andy!" calls she: "Andy!" He is at the other end of the garden, and at first does not hear her. "Andy!" however, restores him to a proper frame of mind.

"Hi!" says he, from the middle of a bed of cabbage.

"Come here! come at once! It is something very important."

This brings him to her at the rate of forty knots an hour.

"Well, what's the matter *now*?" says he.

"Everything!" says Miss McDermot, with commendable brevity.

"That generally means nothing with a girl," says her cousin contemptuously. "However, to do you justice, you look like business *this* time. What is it, eh?"

"If I could be sure of you, Andy," says she forlornly; "but you will be as likely as not to take *his* side."

"Whose side?"

"Well, you see!"—hesitating—"it's this way"—(dead pause).

"Oh! go on, for goodness' sake. If you *have* anything on what you are pleased to call your mind, get it off! You look" (with all the delightful sympathy that, as a rule, distinguishes the male members of one's family) "like a sick chicken. Anything fresh? or is it the same old game?—our well-beloved uncle on the rampage again?"

"Yes! and this time with a vengeance!" says Dulcinea wrathfully. "He—*insists* on my keeping my engagement with Sir Ralph, in spite of the fact that I—decline to go on with it!"

"You!" (Andy pauses, and twists her round so as to get a good view of her). "What's up now?" says he. "You decline to go on with your engagement! Why? What's the matter with Sir Ralph?"

"That isn't the question!" says she vehemently. "I refuse to discuss Sir Ralph with you or anybody. What has to be considered is, whether I am to be sold—yes, *sold*—against my will to anybody!"

"Keep your hair on," says her cousin blandly. "There's something behind this slave-market business, isn't there? I never heard a word of it until—that young friend of yours fell into the bog, and was dragged out by some inconsiderate person by the hair of his head, and brought home to be nursed by you."

"I don't know of any one who fell into a bog, and was pulled out by his hair," says she coldly.

"Look here, Dulcie" (putting her down on a mouldering rustic seat), "let's give a name to it. *Eyre* is the bogged one's name. And I expect he has been making love to you—eh?"

"At all events, he isn't like *some* people!" exclaims she,

with a little frown. "He doesn't lecture and scold and *trample* on me from morning till night!"

"We shall now proceed to give a name to the trampler," says Mr. McDermot. "Anketell! And so you want to throw over Anketell and marry Eyre? Is that what it comes to?"

"N—o. Not exactly."

"Then you want to throw over Anketell, and *not* marry Eyre. Is that it?"

"No—not quite."

"Then, my good girl, what *is* it? If you could throw just one ray of light upon the mystery, I might be able to see you home."

"Well—it's this, then!" says she, with a sudden touch of passion. "I won't submit to be *ordered* to marry any one, and certainly not a *tyrant* like Sir Ralph! Why, if you could have heard him yesterday! But never mind that. The fact is, Andy, that Mr. Eyre—asked me to marry him; and—I didn't say yes—because—— Well—never mind *that* either. But he went to father, and father, it appeared, was distinctly rude, and told him—— Well" (sighing) "never mind that, either."

"Is there," asks Mr. McDermot mildly, "anything I *may* mind?"

"Yes—this," says she, her anger growing. "He then sent for me."

"He? Eyre? Just like his impudence."

"He is *not* impudent; and it was father who sent for me."

"To give you a good scolding, I hope."

"If you hope that" (trying to rise), "there is no use in my going on with this explanation."

"Yes, there is—every use. I'm sure to come in handy

sooner or later, and therefore it is necessary the plot should be laid bare to me. Come, go on, *do!* We can have *our* little war later. What did the governor say to you?"

"That I should marry Sir Ralph whether I liked it or not—that nothing should prevent my keeping my engagement with him. He" (paling) "gave me to understand that if I *loathed* Sir Ralph I should still marry him."

"But you don't loathe him."

"I'm not sure. I" (passionately)—"I am actually *certain* that he has backed up father in this matter, and if only to punish me for being a little—you know—a little——"

"Yes—I know" (nodding).

"Well, to punish me for that, he, too, is in the plot to compel me to marry him."

"What *rot!*" says her cousin forcibly, if inelegantly, "That isn't a bit like Anketell! You must be out of your mind to talk of him like that!"

"You don't know him as I do. You think he is fond of me. Now, I" (raising her head and gazing at her cousin with glowing eyes)—"I *know* that he detests me!"

"Come in and have your head shaved! Come quickly. Typhoid, I should say, to look at you."

"Nonsense! There—*don't* go on like a lunatic! I mean every word I say. The very last interview I had with him he was rude, and cutting, and indifferent, and cruel, and——"

"He must have forgotten to pay a compliment or two," says her cousin thoughtfully.

"You can jest if you like," says Dulcinea, rising now with determination. "I did think, Andy" (casting a reproachful glance at him), "that I might have hoped for sympathy and help from *you!*"

"I don't think I understand it," says Andy carefully. "You want to marry Eyre, and you don't want to marry Anketell: is that it?"

"No" (shortly). "I don't want to marry either of them."

"Not *Eyre*?" (doubtfully).

"Certainly not. All I want is—to be *free*. To let Sir—to let father see that I am not to be *commanded* to marry any one. Andy" (coaxingly), "help me. Speak to—father—do! Help me to break off this odious engagement."

"And so let you free to marry that whipper-snapper upstairs with his black, black eye! No, I won't!" says Andy, with decision. "Sir Ralph is worth a dozen of him. Do you think I don't see through you? You have fallen in love with that Italian (who looks quite absurd without the monkey and the organ), and you want to pretend that all you desire is freedom."

"You refuse to help me, then?" asks Dulcinea, looking suddenly very tall, and very white, and very earnest.

"To your hurt!—yes."

"Very well, then. Since you have all forsaken me I shall act for myself. I shall let you and father and Sir Ralph see what I can do,—*unaided*."

She turns, and walks down the path towards the gate.

"Look here, Dulcie. Come back! let's talk it over," says he, hurrying after her, impressed in spite of himself by her manner. But she waves him to one side with an imperious gesture, and is soon lost to sight.

"It's going to be a fine evening for fireworks," says Mr. McDermot, contemplating the sky with a thoughtful air. "Great display! unlimited variety! magnificent effect! And smoke!—*much* smoke!"

IX.

"Thou didst delight my eyes,
Yet who am I? Nor first,
Nor last, nor best, that durst
Once dream of thee for prize,
Nor this the only time
Thou shalt set love to rhyme."

HOW dark it is walking along this silent road! Dark, though only six o'clock. How quickly the day dies when it is December! Such a moon as this is hardly worth talking about; and yet without it, obscured as it is, how much more dismal would the night be! Was there ever before so *silent* a night? Are all the dogs in the farmsteads dead? There is no sound at all anywhere, save the stir of sea in the starlight, far, far below, down there, where all things seem to sink into one.

Bridget!—what is Bridget thinking now? Has she found out she is gone? No; not yet. It is early really, though it *looks* so late. Oddly enough, it is to the servant the girl's mind first turns, as in her mad angry folly she runs along the road that leads to the little wayside station of which Eyre had spoken to her. Her hint to Andy that she would let lover and father and cousin *see* what she could do is now in process of full completion. When Eyre had suggested to her to run away with him and be married by

special licence, she had certainly at the moment, though seeming to dally with the idea, no real intention of following it up. But Sir Ralph's unfortunate coldness of the day before, her father's stern command, and finally her cousin's mocking determination not to help her to her folly, had been all too much for her childish pride. She had revolted, once for all: she would *show* them!

Eyre's last words about the 6.30 train, his earnest, really honest expression as he spoke, had lingered in her memory; and waiting, locked up in her own room, she had, when night grew, dressed herself in her warmest clothing, and, slipping out at the side door, begun her journey to Denygra station.

Was there *ever* so long a mile? or a road so deserted? At first she had prayed that no one might see or meet her on her way to the station; but now she would have given a good deal to hear the sound of cart-wheels, or the jog-trot of a farmer's horse. But there is no fair anywhere to-day in the neighbourhood, and so the road remains empty and quiet.

The moon, coming out at last from behind a bank of dark grey clouds, serves only to heighten rather than to lessen her sense of loneliness. Now each hillock and tree and bunch of furze takes shape and action, and threaten to attack her on every side. The terrors of the night are great to those who know nothing of it, safe within carefully closed doors of house or carriage. To Dulcinea, running along through the dull darkness, a sense of despair mingled with active fear is uppermost!

“Silence how dead! and darkness how profound!
Nor eye, nor list'ning ear, an object finds.”

In vain she tells herself that it is not *really* night, that is only six o'clock ; that a few months ago, this very hour and time and dreadful darkness would still be called *day*. It is with a sigh that grows into a sob of passionate relief, that at last she sees the lamps shining in the little station before her, with, over there a quarter of a mile to the left, the glimmering lights—of the small town that has given its name to the station.

Hurriedly she enters it, and, reaching the dim platform, that seems enveloped in a cloudy mist, stands irresolute. Only for a moment, however. Eyre has come to her, has seized her hand, is drawing her into the fuller lights beyond.

"Let us stay here," says she, in a choking tone. "No one can see us here. And—— Oh !" (a little wildly) "it was a long walk. How far—how *far* I am from home !"

"You are nervous," says he sensibly—*too* sensibly ; "and it is my fault. I forgot, when I suggested to you that the walk here was only a mile, that it would be undertaken, in mid-winter. It never occurred to me that six o'clock would mean *night* at this time of year. You must try to forgive me that. What is that you have ? Your bag ? Give it to me."

The station is such a minor one that, at this hour, it is given up to absolute solitude—almost. In the far distance a sturdy farmer is trudging to and fro, puffing and blowing, and seeking, by eager marchings from the gate to the station-house, to keep some warmth in his body ; and just here, where *"Dulcinea"* stands, a labourer goes by on his homeward way ; and there—over there, where the gloom is thickest—stands, by all the worst luck in the world,
Ralph Anketell.

He had been lunching in this part of the neighbourhood

during the afternoon, and, expecting a parcel by this train, had decided to wait and take it home with him. He had seen Eyre's arrival, and wondered at his punctuality, the train not being due for a quarter of an hour or so ; had felt a sense of satisfaction in the thought that he was really leaving—a thought justified by the amount of luggage lying on the platform ; had designedly withdrawn so far into the shade that he should be unseen by him, not feeling equal to a *tête-à-tête* with the man he suspects to be his rival ; and had seen Dulcinea's nervous entrance, and Eyre's eager greeting of her.

To for one instant imagine their meeting involuntary would be to know himself a fool ; and when he sees Eyre possess himself of the small bag that Dulcinea carries, he knows the truth as surely as though all the world were crying it within his ears.

Numbed—stupefied—chilled to the heart's core, he stands watching the girl to whom he has given every thought and desire of his life, wilfully making havoc of them.

"Nervous?" says Dulcinea vaguely, staring at Eyre, as if hardly understanding him. It has come home to her that certainly he does not understand *her*. Nervous ! Is that the word for this awful pain that is tugging at her heart ? Oh ! what *madness* had brought her here ?

A sense of fear—distinct, *clutching*, is shaking her. It grows too dreadful to be borne. Eyre is talking to her. She is conscious of that ; but no word he utters is clear to her. To go back, to go back !—that one thought, and that only, is beating like a hammer in her brain ; but behind it, and through it, comes another—the oddest one, surely—that *if* she goes she will never see Anketell again !

Presently the mists of her brain clear a little, and she can wonder within herself. Eyre is still talking—kindly, no doubt, and soothingly; but it doesn't seem of any consequence at all what he is saying. Ralph! What will *he* think? When he hears she is gone—gone: what will he think then? She trembles. She becomes for the first time conscious that she is cold—*so* cold! It must be the night air that is making her shiver like this.

She must go back. She *will*. Even the dull lights in the station are beginning to add to her terror. Surely—*surely* every one is looking at her, wondering about her, gossiping about her!

Yet the one person who in reality is looking at her with an anguish unspeakable is the one person unsuspected by her.

She sighs heavily, as one might whose mind is made up after a long conflict. She throws up her head. Eyre is still speaking.

"We shall not have long to wait now," he is saying: "the train is just due. Come, we had better move a little this way."

"I can't!" She pauses, and looks straight at her companion, a terrible misery in her eyes. It seems as if speech has deserted her. "I won't go any farther," she gasps at last painfully.

"You mean?" questions Eyre, as if not able to grasp the truth that lies so plainly in her white face and gleaming eyes. As he pauses for an answer the shrill whistle of the approaching train cleaves the sharp crispy air.

"Forgive me," says the girl, trembling in every limb. "I—I *thought* I could do it, but I can't. I'm frightened—I——"

"I told you you were nervous," says he. "And I know it is a wrench ; but surely, darling, it is best for you : you have so often *told* me how unhappy you were——"

"I must have lied to you," says she solemnly. "*Lied*. Not meaning it—not intentionally ; but because I didn't *know*. I know *now*. I must go home : I *must*."

"As you will, of course !" says Eyre, very stiffly. Has all his chivalry come to this, that she will none of him, of his aid, or sympathy, or affection ? Surely he is as modern a Don Quixote as one may hope to find ! "You *really* wish to return ?"

"I do—I do indeed !" says the poor child, clasping her hands imploringly.

Mr. Eyre makes but one answer to this impassioned and distinctly unflattering appeal—he returns her her bag. To the man in the dusk beyond, watching them with a livid face, this act seems unprecedented.

"Has it occurred to you how you are to get back ?" asks Eyre, in a tone calculated to freeze a salamander.

"I shall be able to manage that" (feverishly). "I shall indeed ! Oh !—there is your train !" (as that snorting machine dashes into the station). "Go—*go* !"

"I shall '*go*' certainly, sooner or later," says he sullenly. "Though considerably later than will please you, to judge by your manner. But *before* I oblige you, I shall see you safe into your home."

"If you do, you will miss your train. Do—*do* think of that !" says she, in a small agony. "See—they are shutting the doors, and—— Oh !" (breaking off with a little gasp of hope that ends almost in a cry), "there is Andy ! *Andy* !" calling out loud). "*There* ! Don't you see him ?—just

running into the station! I'd know his legs anywhere! Andy! Andy!"

It is indeed Andy!—*in* the flesh, and *out* of humour. All day long, ever since his memorable encounter with her in the vegetable garden, he had decided to keep an eye upon her, and an eye he *had* kept without blinking—that is, so long as the daylight lasted. But when five o'clock came, and the short winter day was at an end, he had relaxed his vigilance, and decided to consider himself off duty.

He had been wondering would she come to tea with him, as usual, in the old schoolroom? Perhaps she would; perhaps, too, she wouldn't. As the hour struck he had gone there, and waited.

He waited for quite half an hour without a misgiving. He waited another quarter of an hour with considerable misgivings. At a quarter to six he waited no longer, but went three steps at a time upstairs to old Bridget to ask her if she knew where Miss Dulcie was.

Mrs. Driscoll had no idea. She put down her knitting, and wrinkled her brows so strongly, that Andy, who had not believed them capable of another crease, gazed at her astounded. Wasn't she down in the schoolroom, then? No, she wasn't. She hadn't come in yet, then?

Come in?

Andy's heart began to beat a little quickly. What was it she had said?—that she would let them *see*! Did she *begin* to let them see when she—*went out*? But when was that?

"*When* did she go out?" asks he.

"Faix, not so long thin," said the old nurse, in a little frightened fashion. "Have ye anything on yer mind,

Masther Andy? If ye have, spake out ! I mind me now she kissed me in a quare, mad, disturbin' sort of a way, when she was lavin'. I mind, too, that I tould her it was a bit late for a ramble, an' she laughed sthrange like, an' said maybe she'd niver have a chance of a ramble agin, so she might as well have it now as not. Oh ! wirra ! wirrasthrue ! What'll I do if harm has come to me beauty ? ”

Andy had cut her short. It was evident *her* mind ran on suicide : *his* mind ran on Eyre. He knew the latter was leaving this evening ; and the suspicion that Dulcie in a mad, angry moment had agreed to go with him, seized upon him and held him. He left the old woman rocking herself to and fro, and praying to every saint in the calendar.

It didn't take him two minutes to find his hat, and rush out into the chill night air *en route* for the wayside station.

* * * * *

“ Andy ! ” cries Dulcinea frantically, in a subdued yet piercing tone that reaches not only Andy's ears but those of Anketell in his distant corner. His are unnaturally strained.

“ Well, here I am ! ” says Andy, calling out too, in a distinctly indignant tone.

“ He hears me ! ” says Dulcinea, with a little sob of delight, turning excitedly to her companion. “ He is coming ! Oh ! *before* he comes, go ! go ! Do you hear me ? See, the train is on the point of leaving ! If you wait another moment, you will be left behind, and I—— Oh ! *do* go ! ” (giving him a frenzied push). “ I will write : I will explain—only go ! ”

“ Write !—explain ! ” Eyre feels as if his senses are deserting him. The girl he has put himself in this false position to save from abominable tyranny is the one who now

deliberately—nay, passionately—repudiates his assistance. Explain! “There is no explanation—*none!*” stammers he, hardly knowing what he says. Righteous anger is burning in his breast.

“Oh! But I *will* write!” declares she, growing desperate as she sees Andy approaching. “There! Be *quick!*” Again she pushes him towards the now almost moving train; and Eyre, confused, angry, puzzled, obeys her touch, and springs into the carriage nearest to him.

Almost unconsciously he had sprung into it. The door is banged by a passing porter, and presently he finds that he is under weigh, and leaving Dulcinea for ever!

The train disappears into the night. Eyre, leaning back in his corner—the corner usually coveted, but undisputed in this empty train—gives himself up to thought. It is a revelation to him to find presently that he is feeling far more angry than miserable. Bathos upon pathos!

Up to this, indeed, he had regarded himself as a *preux chevalier*—a Don Quixote. He had exulted in his rôle of Knight of Woeful Damosels; and here—*here* is his reward! Lo! when it came to the point, the captive maiden had *declined* to be rescued, and clung heroically, if unpoetically, to the tyranny she might have escaped.

There must be something wrong somewhere! Eyre, enveloping himself in his rug, makes a mental vow to abjure distressed damsels for all time, and devote himself for the future to the worldly, reasonable beings, who hitherto have been the solace of his existence.

X.

"Those who inflict must suffer, for they see
The work of their own hearts, and that must be
Our chastisement or recompense."

DULCINEA, left alone upon the platform, turns with a quick breath of mingled fear and relief to Andy, who has only just joined her.

"Nice bit of business this!" says that young man.

"Oh! don't talk here, Andy; come outside—come beyond the gate: I——"

"I don't see what going beyond the gate will do!" says Mr. McDermot, looking like adamant. "May as well have it out here, where I can see you, as in the dusty road."

"I'm tired, Andy," says she faintly, with a vague but fruitless hope of softening him.

"Not too tired to come here in the middle of the night, anyway."

"In the middle of the night! Oh, Andy! Why, it *can't* be more than half-past six!"

"How well you know the hours of the train! Who" (malignantly) "taught you? My word! all I can say is, that you have done it *this* time, at all events."

"Done what?" (more faintly still).

"Do you want me to put it into words?" says her cousin, regarding her in the dim dull light of the station lamps

with a disgust hardly to be put into words. "You *are* a fool, Dulcinea!"

"You don't know anything!" says Dulcinea, taking all the courage she has into her hand and preparing to do battle with it. "You accuse me; you say things,—but" (incoherently) "you know *nothing*! *Nothing*! I came out only—only to—to" (desperately) "see if I could match some wool in the village down there, and I wandered on here, and——"

"What a *banger*!" says her cousin. "Is that the best you can do? 'To match wool by *this* light! Why not say you came to meet a young *lady*? There would be a pretty colour about that, at all events."

"It was wool!" persists Dulcinea dismally.

"With a pretty colour about it too!" with growing scorn. "Oh no! it won't *do*, my good Dulcie. D'ye think I can't see how the land lies? Wait till you see Bridget! She's got a word or two to say to you, believe me! She's got it hot and strong for you, and *no* mistake."

"Bridget will say nothing to me," says Dulcinea. "She at least" (unsteadily), "has always been kind to me."

"Your quarter's up *there*," says Andy. "Expect no grace. She's only waiting to see you, to give you the biggest bit of *her* mind on record."

"Take me to her," says Dulcinea, in a low tone, suggestive of intense fatigue, bodily and mental.

"What makes you so tired?" asks her cousin, trying to see her face. "You seem done up. What!" (as the thought dawns upon him), "do you mean to say that you *walked* here? Marched every step of the way through the cold and damp to meet that fellow!"

Dulcie nods her head ; words now are almost beyond her.

"By George ! you *must* be fond of him !"

"I am *not* !" says Dulcinea, with a faint, a very faint, return of her old spirit.

"You expect me to believe that, and yet you certainly came all this way for the mere sake of giving him a parting word, of seeing him safely off?"

"Yes—*yes*," says his cousin, with such over-eager confession that she opens his eyes to the full truth.

"To go off with him !" says he slowly. "Is that it, really ? Oh, Dulcie !"

There is such reproach, such *surprised* reproach in his young voice, that Dulcinea gives way beneath it.

"Oh ! it is all true, Andy—all ! every word you have said. Father, Sir Ralph, even *you*, were unkind to me. And he—though I didn't care for him—he was kind ; and he asked me to come away from all this trouble——"

"You mean to say you spoke to him—you *complained* to him of Sir Ralph—of your *father* ?"

"I did. I know now it was hateful of me ; but—he was very kind, and I was unhappy. And Sir Ralph was so cold, and so lecturing-like—and——" She breaks off.

"Well ! I wouldn't have believed it of you," says Andy, shaking his head gloomily. "And Anketell such a *good* sort ! However" (pulling himself together), "the one thing now to be considered is, how you are to get home. It will take a long time to get a car up here from that beastly hole below ; and by the time we reach the house the governor will be in such a fume that there will be no holding him."

"Can't we walk ?" (eagerly).

"That would occupy even longer, I suppose. I know

what girls are—stumbling over every stone and shrieking at every shadow. No; that would take hours, and set the governor's back up an inch or two higher. He'd be 'all alive O,' with a vengeance, like the cockles, if we didn't get home before that."

"What *shall* we do, then?" says Dulcie, glancing miserably round her.

"I wish I knew. Better stay here until I run down to the village and bring back a car of some sort. 'Pon my soul" (moodily), "you *have* done it for once, and handsomely when you were about it!"

At this moment it so happens that Dulcinea, in her remorse and grief and despair, changes her position. She had thought of escaping her cousin's eye—which is sharp, to say the least of it; but, not understanding the eccentricities of the station lamps, so turns that he can see her even more distinctly.

Perhaps it was a wise move, if unstudied. The dull, dead lamp over there shows Mr. McDermot such a pale, tear-stained and miserable little face, that all his wrath dies down before it.

"After all," begins he hurriedly, and in a considerably milder voice, "there's one thing in your favour—I don't forget that. When it came to the scratch, you didn't go with him. You caved in at the right hour; and no wonder, too. The barrel-organ business wouldn't be good enough for you. I say, Dulcie, old girl, don't—don't *cry*, whatever you do! Keep up your pecker: leave it all to me, and I'll pull you through; I'll square it with the governor if he finds you out, and I'm afraid he's bound to do *that*, as you are very considerably out, not only of your

house, but your reckoning. Ha ! ha ! that's a joke ! D'ye see it ? ”

In this melancholy way he seeks to cheer her ; but Dulcinea is beyond seeing anything. She is like Niobe—
“ all tears.”

“ You'll be in hysterics in a second, if you don't keep a tight rein,” says her cousin, in a horror-stricken way. “ Look here ! ” (glancing apprehensively around him), “ you'll be *heard* if you go on like that. I wish to goodness there was some way of getting you home in a hurry : we could then put it on the pins or the wool-work safely ; but——
By Jove ! ”—starting—“ there's Sir Ralph ! ”

XI.

"To know, to esteem, to love—and then to part
Makes up life's tale to many a feeling heart."

"**W**HAT?" says Dulcinea. She stands still, as if turned into stone. Her tears cease. She feels frozen. *He*—he, of all men, here! Had he seen—guessed——

"Sir Ralph, by all that's fortunate."

"Where?"

"Just over there: evidently come this moment, as if in answer to my prayer." In fact, Sir Ralph, who had been going away from the platform, having seen all he never wished to see, had turned at the last second to speak to a porter; and had, therefore, when Andy's eyes fell on him, all the appearance of one coming *towards*, instead of going away from him.

"Was there ever such luck? Of course he's got a trap of some sort. He'll drive you home. I say, Anketell——"

"Oh, Andy!"—grasping his arm—"Oh, Andy! Don't! *don't!*"

"Don't what?"—angrily.

"Don't make me go home with him!" (in an agonised whisper).

"But, why—why?"—impatiently.

"Oh, not with him! Supposing he was here all the time, and saw——"

"Nonsense! He has evidently only just come——"

"I won't go home with him," says Dulcinea, in a choking tone: "*I won't!*"

"Don't be a *fool!*" says her cousin angrily. "You shall go with him! It will kill all talk. You must be mad to refuse such a chance of doing away with your folly." He takes a step forward.

"Andy!"—frantically. But he has escaped from her now, and has reached Anketell. There is a word or two, and then both men return to where she is standing, feeling more dead than alive.

"Here is Sir Ralph, Dulcie," says Andy, in a rather nervous fashion. "By the way, you are driving, Anketell—eh? Could you give my cousin a lift?"

"With pleasure"—gravely.

"You pass our gates, you see, and—er—we—we'd no idea, when we started for our walk, that—er—we should be so late. Found ourselves, you know"—the falsehood sticking horribly in his throat—"at the station before we knew where we were."

"I understand"—quickly. It cuts Anketell to the heart to hear the lad lying thus; and such fruitless lies—and delivered so haltingly, so lovingly!

"Eyre left to-night by the train," says Andy, with a highly nervous, miserable laugh. "She—we——"

"I see," says Anketell hurriedly. "You came to see him off?—very natural."

"It's a long walk home for Dulcie," says her cousin, more haltingly than ever. "But if——"

"Of course I can give your cousin a seat," says Anketell. He addresses himself entirely to McDermot, altogether ignoring Dulcinea. This, and something in his tone, strikes chill to Andy's heart; but he compels himself to go through with the sorry farce. As for Dulcinea, a kind of cold recklessness has come to her that does duty for courage. Her late tears lie frozen in her eyes. Her glance is fixed immovably on the ground beneath her; yet, in spite of that, she knows that Anketell has never once deigned to glance in her direction.

"Thank you," says Andy diffidently. "And"—pausing—"if, when you came to our *back* gate—if you were to drop her *there*, it would be better. Will you? You see, if the governor knew that—er—I—had kept her out so late, he—he'd be down on *me*. It's all my fault, d'ye see—every bit of it."

"I quite see," says Anketell gravely, laconically, as before. "By-the-bye, I can give you a seat too."

"No, thanks! I'd rather not—really. I shall enjoy the walk." The poor boy is choking with shame, and feels that to accept even so trifling a favour as a seat home from the man he is trying so deliberately to deceive would be more than he is equal to. "It's a lovely evening, and nothing of a walk."

He waves an adieu, and turns aside; but seeing him go, Dulcinea wakes from her stupor.

"Andy!" cries she wildly, a fever of entreaty in her whole air: "Andy, come with me. *Come!*"

But he is deaf to her entreaties. He shakes his head, and hurries out into the darkness of the night beyond.

"I bet I'll be home before you!" he calls out from some-

where—they can no longer see him. “It’s a mile to walk, but three to drive : that gives me a good chance.”

It is three miles indeed !—three of the longest miles Dulcinea has ever driven. There are moments when she tells herself that it *cannot* take all these *hours* to come this short, short way, and wonders if Anketell has not made a mistake and turned into some other unknown road. It is so dark by this, that to see where she is is impossible.

And yet it is a fine night too,—no sign of rain or storm. Certainly the moon is lying hidden, and the stars are apparently forgetful of their duty ; but the wind that flies past Dulcinea’s cheek is singularly mild and kindly for the time of year. Everything seems hushed : no sound arises to break the monotony of the silence that has fallen on her and her companion. Now and again a rustling in the wayside branches, a fluttering of wings, a sleepy “Cheep-cheep,” betray the presence of those “smale foule,”

“That slepen allê night with open eye,”

according to Geoffrey Chaucer ; but other noises are there none.

Shame, fear, fatigue, all are keeping Dulcie dumb. Oh to be home in her own chamber, safe from prying eyes, safe in any place where she may weep out her very soul in comfort ! Oh this horrible, *horrible* drive !—will it never come to an end ? And he—why is he so silent ? Can he *know* ? She shrinks within herself as this thought occurs to her, but quickly flings it off with one as grim. No, a thousand times no ! If he knew, he would not be here with her now. He would not condescend to sit beside her ; he would cast her off. Oh ! if ever he *does* hear of it—what then ?

But if he knows nothing, why does he not say something to her? Again the first torturing doubt sets in.

As for Anketell—he has even forgotten he is silent, so busy are his thoughts with all the past miserable hour. Again he seems to be standing in the dusky corner of the station; again he sees *her* come slowly forward. The quick advance of Eyre, her reception of him so devoid of surprise of any kind, her giving up of the small bag to him—how plainly it is all printed on his brain—in type that will stand out clear to the day of his death! No fear of its fading.

And then—the agonised watching for the train to come in. The horrible fascination that *compelled* him to wait and see her go—go with that other!—that was the worst part of it! He had thought that at the last moment—the very last—as her foot was on the step of the compartment, he would spring forward and draw her back, and implore her to return home and—marry his rival later in a more orthodox form.

But she had not given him that opportunity! He had watched her impassioned change of decision—her refusal to carry out her design—her vehement relief when she saw her cousin. But her abandonment of Eyre at the last moment did her no good with him—rather, it increased the passionate, grievous anger that is tearing his heart in two. *False* she was to her very core! And weak as false! False to *both*!

A heavy sigh breathing from his companion's white lips at this moment wakes him from his stormy reverie.

He turns to her.

A star or two have pierced the heaven's dusk by this time,

and there, on the left, a pale, still crescent is stealing to its throne. Diana, a very *young* Diana, is awake at last :—

“Wide the pale deluge floats.”

Slowly up from behind the hill beyond she comes, shedding glory on the earth with each slow, trailing step.

“How like a queen comes forth the lovely moon,
From the slow opening curtains of the clouds
Walking in beauty to her midnight throne !”

She gives Anketell the chance of seeing how his companion looks.

Cold, shivering, chilled to her heart's core. Her pretty face is not only sad, but blue ; her little hands, lying gloveless (what had she done with her gloves ?)—on the rug, look shrunken to even smaller dimensions than usual, and are trembling. A sharp pang contracts Anketell's throat.

“You are cold !” says he, in a tone so icy that no wonder she shivers afresh.

“No ! no !” says she hastily, through chattering teeth.

“You *must* be !” says he angrily, “with only that little thin jacket on you. Here !” (pulling up with decided violence a warm plaid from under the seat), “put this on you !”

“I would rather not,” says she, making an effort to repulse him.

“Put it on *directly* !” says he, so fiercely that she gives in without another word. In twining it round her, his hand comes in contact with hers. “Your hands are like ice !” says he, his voice once again breathing fury. “What do you mean by it ? Was there no rug, that you should thus be dying of cold ?”

"I don't mind the cold. I don't think of it," says she wearily.

"Then think of it now ! Put your hands under the rug *instantly* !"

His manner is really almost unbearable ; but Miss McDermot has got to such a low ebb that she has not the courage to resent it. He pulls up the rug.

"Cover them at once !" says he, and she meekly obeys him. What does it matter ?—it is all over between him and her. It is quite plain to her that, even if ignorant of this evening's work, he still detests her. His tone, manner, entire air, convinces her of that. Well, she will give him an opportunity of honourably getting rid of her. She will *tell* him of her intention of running away with Eyre. That will do it ! He is just the sort of man to stick to his word through thick and thin, however hateful the task may be. But when he hears that she deliberately meant to run away with some one else—Oh ! *was* it deliberate ? She will tell him. But not *now*. To-morrow—perhaps. No (sternly)—to-morrow *certainly*. He is coming to dine with them ; and after dinner, in the drawing-room, she can then give him the opportunity of releasing himself from this unfortunate engagement. How *glad* he will be ! How—

Anketell moves uneasily in his seat. What is that little soft, sad, broken-hearted sound that has fallen on his ears ? Dulcinea is crying—so much is plain. Not noisily, not obtrusively—it is, indeed, a stifled, a *desperately* stifled sob, that betrays her.

"I am afraid you are unhappy about something," says he unrelentingly. He is frowning. Fretting for that damned fellow, he tells himself ; and the thought does

not throw oil upon the waters. He seems to pause for a reply; but, none coming, he goes on: "To fret about anything is folly," says he hardly. "There is a way out of most difficulties. I dare say you will find one out of yours!"

This lost lover she is crying for—this lover lost by her own fear of sacrificing too much for him—may be regained. No doubt, enchained by her lovely face, he will be glad to be recalled. She can write to him, and he will respond warmly. And he is a man of means. Once The McDermot has been told that he (Anketell) declines to carry out the engagement with his daughter, the old man will be pleased enough to give her to Eyre,—Eyre, who has undeniably good prospects.

As for Dulcinea, her sobs have now ceased entirely. Anketell's last words have struck a chill to her heart. He is not in touch with her. He feels nothing for her. Her distress causes him no pain. It is impossible he should know of her unfortunate affair with Eyre; and yet once again her heart dies within her. That terrible doubt returns. It was scotched—not killed. Her tears dry upon her hot cheeks. This is no time for tears. If—if he was at the station when she arrived, and had seen her meeting *with Eyre—without* Andy! Oh! no, no! Anything but that!

XII.

"Fortune's wings are made of Time's feathers,
Which stay not whilst one may measure them."

"The consciousness of being loved softens the keenest pang."

IT has come to an end at last—this interminable drive! He has driven her up to the back gate, has lifted her carefully down, has bidden her a most distant good night. Miserable—frightened—leaving hope behind her, and expecting a storm before her, she runs down the short road, through the farmyard, and into the house. Her father! what will he say? She shivers in every limb as she dwells upon his wrath. It would be serious enough if it had only to do with her being out of the house at this hour. But when he hears of the sequence—the breaking off of her engagement with Anketell—how will it be then?

Racing upstairs at the top of her speed, she rushes into her own room and into the arms of Mrs. Driscoll.

The old woman, worn out with fear for the fate of her darling, has spent the last two hours wandering from room to room, and praying loudly to all her saints. Prayers unheard except in heaven, as the gaunt old house is virtually empty. Now, seeing her nursling return to the nest, she forgets all the distress, the absolute torture she

has been enduring, and, being Irish, lets the past go in the joy of the glad present. All is forgotten, save that her child has returned to her.

"Oh, Bridget!" says Dulcinea, clinging to her—"oh, Bridget!"

"There, now! There me darlint! Take yer breath now. 'Tis home ye are, an' safe wid yer ould Biddy. Hush now, alanna!"—squeezing her to her ample bosom. "Arrah! who'd be able to harm ye wid *me* at hand? But"—anxiously—"where were ye at all at all?"

"Oh, Bridget! how I *love* you!" cries the poor child gratefully, clinging to her with all her might. "I thought you too would be against me!"

"Is it me, asthore?—me who nussed ye?"

"Well, he *said* you had it 'in for me,' or something like that."

"Who, darlin'? Tell me the name o' the scamp who'd say such words o' me!"

"It was Andy."

"Masther Andy! You've seen him, then?" says the old woman eagerly. "He was *wid* ye, Miss Dulcie" (drawing her to the fire). "Sit down here, agra! an' tell me all about it."

She leads the girl to the roaring wood fire that is blazing up the chimney—a fire so carefully tended in hopes of her darling's return, that it is now indeed a noble spectacle—and pushes her into a big armchair. And Dulcie, worn out with conflicting passions—doubts that have grown to certainties, and certainties that have once again resolved themselves into doubts—sinks into the welcome chair, and drawing down the old nurse to the

hearthrug beside her, pours into her ears the tale of the evening. With many sighs and many sobs she makes her humiliating confession ; but, in spite of Andy's dire threat, the faithful old nurse refrains from censure of any kind.

"It is all over now, honey—all at an end" (soothing her).
"There—there—*fee* now, to spoil yer purty eyes ! Sure, what were ye, but a bit mistaken ! Bad scan to Masther Andy for frightenin' ye like this ! 'Twill be all over in no time. Sorra one will know of it——"

"*He* knows of it—part of it—he——"

"Misther Eyre ? He's a gentleman," says Mrs. Driscoll, who has in her pocket at this moment the very handsome *douceur* he had bestowed on her at parting.

"Mr. Eyre ! I'm not thinking of *him*."

"Of who, thin, darlin' ?"

"Sir Ralph" (faintly).

"Arrah, nonsense ! Sure you know he'll niver hear of it !" says Nurse, who, after all, in spite of her many good qualities, is frail.

"He will know. He *shall* know !" says her young mistress, springing to her feet.

"Eh ?" (Mrs. Driscoll regards her with apprehension : what does she mean now ?) "Sit down—ye're tired, Miss Dulcie dear," says she, with all the air of one trying to cajole an angry child.

"I shall tell him !" says Dulcie, with determination.

"Faix, you won't," says Mrs. Driscoll. "'Tis mad ye are just now ; but whin the mornin' comes, an' I've a talk at ye agin, ye'll know where yer right road lies."

"Oh ! to-morrow !" says Dulcie, with a groan. "Do you know he is coming to dinner to-morrow ? Father asked

him, and—— But perhaps he will get out of it now. He hates me. I know that ; I've *reasons* for knowing it."

"Raysons ! There isn't a rayson in ye," says Mrs. Driscoll, with supreme contempt. "As if any one, with an eye *that wasn't yours*, couldn't see that he just delights in the sight of ye. Why, 'twas ony yestherday I overheard yer father sayin'——"

"Oh, father !" (impatiently). "Father *wants* to think as you do. By-the-bye, Bridget" (turning a frightened face to her nurse), "what of father? Where is he? What did he say? Was he asking for me? Is he *very* angry?"

"Wisha, me dear, he knows nothin' of it."

"*Nothing?*"

"Ne'er a ha'porth. By all the luck o' the world Micky Flynn took to fightin' agin this evenin' shortly afther you—wint for yer walk—and the devil's own thrade he made of it. It appears he and Danny Murphy wint at it tooth an' nail down in the village below, all about nothin' but that ould ancient goose as Danny sould to Mrs. Flynn for a shillin' (an' faix, between ourselves, miss, it *was—damn* ould), an' Micky let into his skin like mad, an' Danny is now lyin' kilt below in his cabin wid the wife screechin' over him like a burnt cat."

"Not *dead*?" (horror-stricken).

"Oh no, me dear ! just a rib or two ; but 'twas a most marcifful occurrence. You see, they sint for the masther at once, an' down he wint to Dan's house, an' niver a word has he heard of your bein' in or out."

"Oh !" says Dulcinea, with a long sigh of intense relief. So much will be spared her, at all events.

"I've had a grudge agin Flynn for ten year," says Mrs.

Driscoll. "He once promised to marry me sisther's cousin's nephew by marriage, an' he niver got as far as the alther ; but I forgive him now. He's done a good job for ye this night. And now, darlin', won't ye let me undhress ye, an' put ye to bed? ye're worn out. I can see it ; an' a poached egg an' a cup o' tay, that'll be the revivin' of ye. I'll bring it up to ye, whin yer undhressed. Ye'll sleep aisy afther it."

XIII.

"Is there no place
Left for repentance, none for pardon left?"

"My life's a load!"

BUT, in spite of the poached egg and the tea, Dulcinea hardly slept at all. There was half an hour here and there of broken slumber, in which uncomfortable dreams held full sway, to the greater destroying of her peace when waking from them; but beyond that she lay all night with open eyes, thinking unhappy things, and crying inwardly with great longing for the day.

And at last it comes, reluctantly, as all winter mornings come, having no light of life to warm them. The sun for them lies dead. He may be there, somewhere; but his glory is denied them. A dull, cloudy, grey, taciturn day makes clear the window-panes to Dulcinea,—so silent, so devoid of sound is it indeed, that one might almost think of Nature as lying in her shroud.

A shroud typical!—outside, all the world is swathed in a white sheet—the garb of death. During the night the soft flakes had fallen, silently, steadily; and now branch and leaf are laden with them. There had been snow before, but nothing like this. And still it falls.

“Through the hush’d air the whitening shower descends.
At first thin, wavering, till at last the flakes
Fall broad and wide and fast, dimming the day
With a continual flow.”

Dulcinea’s first thought on seeing the day is, that probably Anketell will not be able to come over to dinner. This should have caused her relief; but to her surprise it causes her only a deepening of the depression that is weighing her down. Oh, he must come! He *must*! How can she live with this burden on her mind? She will confess all to him; will tell him everything; will open to him the way to rid himself honourably of her—to put an end to his hated engagement.

All day she wanders aimlessly from room to room, longing for, whilst dreading, the hour that shall tell her if he is, or is not coming. Towards five o’clock she finds herself in the schoolroom once again, and sinking into a chair rests her elbows on her knees and lets her lovely, disconsolate face fall into her little chilly palms.

Five! If coming, he will be here in three-quarters of an hour. The snow is still falling, heavily, steadily. It is almost impossible he should come. No one would go out on such a night unless compelled; and he—why, no doubt he will be glad of the excuse to keep away. And yet something within her whispers he will come.

Three-quarters or an hour! It must be a great deal less than that *now*. Raising her eyes to the clock, she is astonished to find that it is only three minutes less. What on earth is the matter with that old clock? She taps it—listens: no, it is going as methodically as ever. Will a quarter to six *ever* come? He is sure to arrive then, The McDermot dining

always at six sharp, and being seriously annoyed if a guest is not on the spot some time beforehand. How often she and Ra—Sir Ralph had laughed over that little eccentricity of his.

A sound in the firelit room behind her makes her spring to her feet. Oh no! not *yet*. Not until she has grasped the back of the chair, and has learned that the incomer is Andy, does she know that she is trembling from head to foot, and that her lips have grown so cold—so *horribly* cold.

“My word! You’re growing active in your old age,” says Mr. McDermot, advancing cheerfully to the fire, and poking it into a glorious blaze. “As a travelling acrobat you’d make your fortune. What made you bounce out of your chair like that? Guilty conscience—eh?” (with a grin). “And! I *say*! What a swell you are! Put on all that toggery to fascinate Anketell over again? I declare, Dulcie, you’re the biggest flirt I ever met. You are hardly off with the new lover before you want to be on again with the old.”

“I don’t want to be on with *anybody*!” says Dulcinea, crimsoning with shame and indignation. “It’s a horrid old gown, and you know it. You’ve seen it fifty times, if once! If you’ve come here only to torment me—only to—to—make a *fool* of yourself, I hope you’ll go away again.”

“I merely” (pulling up his coat and preparing to warm himself properly at the fire) “made the remark that you were distinctly good to look at. Now, any one who can manage to look well in a gown fifty times old, must be a lovely girl indeed! See?—It was a compliment, my dear girl! Why, then, this ungrateful virulence?”

“Stuff!” says his cousin, with increasing ingratitude.

The fact is, she *had* had something on her mind when dressing, something that led to a desire to look her best before Sir Ralph on this—last evening. For that it would be his last as her fiancé seems undoubted to her. It was an old gown she donned, a shabby little black gown ; but the square in front showed a lovely neck that gleamed whiter and more lovely than the snow outside, and the soft bare arms that fell at her sides as she gazed at herself in the glass, worked wonders with the ancient costume.

Mr. McDermot, unmoved by her last remark, drops leisurely on to the fender.

“I say, Dulcie, how did you and he get on last evening?”

“About as badly as you could imagine.”

“Imagination is not my strong point,” says Mr. McDermot modestly, speaking the truth for once in his life. “About how badly, now?”

“Well, I have known him for twelve long months, and never, *never* in all that time was he so—so—abominable to me !”

“Abominable !” (angrily). “If I thought——”

“Oh no !” shaking her charming head, so that the firelight flickers from her long lashes, to the little soft natural fluff of hair that blows across her forehead. “Not abominable in that way. He was quite polite—*hatefully* polite : never speaking a word—or smiling—or——”

“How the deuce could you know whether he was smiling or not?—the night was as black as soot !”

“At *first* ! Not after ! I saw well enough. And besides, his voice would tell you he wasn’t smiling.”

“I dare say it was you who wasn’t smiling.”

“Oh ! of course. You are sure to put *me* in the wrong,

whether or no." A very pretty quarrel is here spoiled by one of the combatants giving in.

"Never mind that," says he. "Do you mean to tell me he—was—well—wasn't like what a fellow engaged to you *should* be?"

"Oh no! indeed he wasn't!" (emphatically). "He was downright *brusque*. He—he quite *ordered* me to put my hands under the rug!"

"And you obeyed?"

"Well—er—*yes*. I—" (shamefacedly) "I—— He was *so* cross, I thought perhaps I had better."

"I can't understand it," says Andy, wrinkling up his brows (these are so low that it doesn't take a second to do it). "Dulcie!" (turning to her in a rather tragic way), "do you think you were right after all,—that he was *there*, I mean? that he saw you and—and that other fellow?"

"No" (dejectedly). "Oh no" (hanging her pretty head so low that even a Parnellite might feel sorry for her). "The fact is, Andy, that he *hates* me."

"*What?*"

"He hates me!" repeats she, with rising strength that is strong through its grief. "That's all."

"And enough too," says Mr. McDermot. "Only" (drawing himself up) "I don't believe it."

"It's true, for all that" (forlornly). "I've known it for a long time. After all" (meditating), "why shouldn't he?"

"Why *should* he?" says Andy vigorously. "Why, look here: you're as nice a girl as *I* know, anyway! Oh, go to the deuce!" says Mr. McDermot, as if addressing some imaginary person at the end of the room. "D'ye

think I can't *see*? I tell you this, Dulcie, he'll find it hard to get as good as you."

"Oh, Andy! what a dear you are!" says his cousin, and suddenly bursts out crying. "But I tell you it's true, for all that," says she, sobbing. "He hates me—he does really; and when he comes to-night I shall tell him all about it, and set him free."

"Free!"

"From his engagement with me. You *can't* see as clearly as *I* do, Andy; and I know he will be delighted to get a chance of saying good-bye to me for ever."

"You mean to say you are going to *tell* him?" Mr. McDermot is gazing at her with distended eyes.

"Yes, just that. I can't *live* with this secret on my mind. And it is dishonourable too, Andy: you must see that. If he knew that I—that I—once even *thought* of—— Oh!" (miserably) "it is very hard to say it. But you know, don't you?"

"Yes, I know."

"Never mind" (frowning painfully), "I *will* say it. It is a good punishment for me. If he knew I had even *thought* of running away with Mr. Eyre, do you think he would still be anxious to marry me himself?"

"He might," says her cousin.

"Oh, Andy!" says Dulcinea, with keen reproach. "Well" (resignedly), "it doesn't matter. I shall tell him the truth, whatever it costs me."

"But look here ——"

"I shall tell him the truth," repeats Dulcinea sadly. "Why should I leave him in ignorance? I shall tell him everything. It is only honourable to do so."

"You are looking after your own honour most carefully," says Andy, with a very unpleasant smile. "Of course" (slowly) "it has never occurred to you to look after *mine*? to consider that you are rather giving me away?"

"Your honour!"

"Yes, mine—that I have sacrificed to your welfare," says Mr. McDermot, with considerable indignation and a prolonged shake of the head.

"What are you talking about, Andy?"

"About you and your ridiculous plans. You will run away with an organ-grinder, and you won't! You will marry a respectable baronet, and you won't! And, in the meantime, you let your good, kind, devoted cousin in for——"

"What?"

"Unlimited lies, if it comes to the point," says Mr. McDermot, sinking into his chair once more, with very distinct rage written in his ordinarily beaming face.

"Lies!"

"Well, d'ye think *he* won't regard them as lies when you tell him what you believe to be the truth? And I shall be the teller of them: *I* shall be the liar."

"But what have you said, Andy?"

"Didn't I tell him you had walked to the station with me? that it was quite a coincidence your meeting Eyre there? that I hoped he would take you home safely, and let you in at the back door without the governor's knowing anything of your escapade (I didn't call it that to him), because if he found you were out he would lay the blame on *me*, who had induced you to go for a walk so late at night. You can do as you like, Dulcie; but I wish you

had told me beforehand you meant to make a confession to him. I should not feel so poor a fellow now as I do."

"If, by speaking to Sir Ralph, you think I shall betray you, Andy—you, who have been so good to me," says Dulcinea, with a pale face, "I certainly shall not speak. I shall simply tell him I wish to put an end to our engagement, and shall decline to say why." She looks up at him with a pale, steady expression.

"It is beyond doubt that he would regard me as a liar of the first water," says Mr. McDermot; "and yet—— If it can help you, Dulcie, to let him know the truth—why—" (generously) "*let him know it.*"

"I could leave you out of the confession," says Dulcinea. "I could let him think—that—that you knew nothing about it. That you—thought too—I—— Oh no!" (miserably) "that wouldn't do: you told him we had walked from home to the station."

"Just that" (grimly). "Never mind, Dulcie! I've been thinking, and I've really come to the conclusion, that to tell him everything will be the best plan, after all. And as for my share in it—why—why—it comes to this, that I'll be glad when he knows the *truth of my lying too!*"

"Oh, Andy! but to betray you!"

"Betray me by all means! I'll live through it. And—I dare say he will understand I did it for you: that'll set me straight with him."

"But—but, indeed, Andy, I couldn't be such a sneak as that. You told a lie for me, and do you think I don't value that? No—— Oh!" (stopping short), "*what's that?*"

'That' is a thundering knock at the hall door!

"He's coming!" says Dulcinea faintly. "Andy" (picking up her skirts and preparing to run), "receive him. Go into the drawing-room. Say anything—that I've a toothache—anything at all."

"But you'll come to dinner?" (in dismay).

"Yes—oh yes!—I suppose I must."

"Why, I thought you were *mad* to tell him all about it—to confess, as you said."

"So I will—so I will; but not just now" (breathlessly). No—" (with a last backward glance) "just—not now, Andy!"

XIV.

“Go, lovely rose
Tell her that wastes her time and me ;
That now she knows,
When I resemble her to thee,
How sweet and fair she seems to me.”

DINNER has come—has gone. And, to be just to it, it was a most dismal affair. In spite of Andy's jocularly, which, in despair, at the end took a rather pronounced turn, this one meal beneath The McDermot's roof has proved a complete failure.

Miss McDermot had refused to help in any way. Just before dinner, as she entered the drawing-room, there had been a little flush upon her white cheeks, a nervous, yet hopeful sparkle in her dark blue eyes. The tall, childish figure had been quite drawn up—even the nut-brown hair coiled on the top of the shapely head had helped to give her the conquering air that she had vainly dreamed might be hers. That old frock!—it *was* old, of course ; but she looked—she *knew* she looked well in it. Once, a long time ago, he had said he liked her in it ; perhaps now, when he saw her again in it—he might——.

Alas ! her hopes even as she crossed the threshold fell dead. Sir Ralph, talking to her father, lifted his eyes,

glanced at her, came forward—reluctantly, it seemed to her—shook hands silently, and dropped back to the hearthrug beside The McDermot, without so much as the appreciative smile. The poor child huddled herself into an armchair somewhere, and told herself it was all over. When she didn't care for him, he cared for her. Now that she has too late wakened to the fact that she loves him, he—does not love her.

As for Anketell, to see her—to go to her—to take her hand and coolly press it—has been torture. Oh! did she *ever* look so desirable as at this moment, when he so fully realises all that he has lost in her—so much loveliness, but not for him! A shabby frock indeed! a poor little frock! but did ever woman yet wear a frock so altogether becoming? Such a shabby gown, and without ornament of any kind: but what ornaments could compare with that sweet, soft neck, with those snowy, slender arms? what jewels could outvie those gleaming eyes? Oh, what a pale but perfect face! and the head—it seemed born to wear a crown! How sad she looks—how sad! *Remembering*, no doubt.

She had thought his glance cold. She could not see that his heart was well-nigh broken. She could not know, seeing him there talking platitudes to his host, with his eyes determinately turned away from hers, that yet in his soul he is looking at her, seeing each curve of her gown. It has come to him that, if she can look so charming in that indifferent garment, how beauteous she might be made to look in something better! Oh that he might be allowed to give her such things as might deck her dainty beauty to its utmost! that he might give her all he possesses! Some part of him she has already, a pure gift of his, that

she will carry to her grave, whether she will or not—*his heart!*

The dinner is over at last, and the dreary half-hour afterwards in the drawing-room. The snow is still falling, falling, and The McDermot has elected that his guest shall spend the night beneath his roof. No going home until morning. Dulcie had gladly left them to see a chamber warmed and sheeted and prepared; and sick at heart, and seeing no chance of a *tête-à-tête* with her betrothed in which to betray to him her one small act of folly, has refused to come down again.

She has gone to her own room, and, still dressed, sits cowering miserably over the huge fire that the old nurse has built for her.

Ten—eleven—twelve has struck. Rising at last, she goes to the window, and, pulling aside the blind, looks out upon the silent night. The snow has ceased! There is no wind. What!—not even rain? She opens the window, and, leaning out, looks first up at the heavens bedecked with stars, then down at the earth beneath!

The latter proves infinitely more interesting!

Below runs a balcony from which The McDermot's den, that in other richer houses would be called the smoking-room, opens. To her surprise a lamp shines through the window, casting a dull, half-shadowed light upon the night outside. Not gone to bed yet? Surely her father— If any one is there she could, from where she now is, hear them talking. Leaning a little farther out, she strains her ears; but no sound comes. No voices float out upon the chilly air. They must have gone to bed and forgotten to put out the lamps.

She had better run down and extinguish them.

She is about to draw in her head with a view to accomplishing this purpose, when the window beneath her leading from the smoking-room to the balcony is thrown open, and a man dressed in evening clothes steps on to it. He has a cigar in his mouth, and the red tip of it shows through the mirk of his surroundings. To mistake this man for any other than Sir Ralph would be impossible !

Dulcinea, drawing back hurriedly, leans against the shutters of her window. The first impulse was not to be seen ; the second compels her to stand upright and face a situation, although it be with blanched cheeks. Now—*now* is her time—to speak.

He is alone. She is sure of that. If she hesitates now, she may not for a long time, perhaps a whole awful interminable week, get a chance of squaring herself with her conscience. She must tell him. Then why not now ?

It takes but a little minute to run down the stairs, open, the smoking-room door, and crossing it reach the balcony.

"*Dulcie !*" says Anketell sharply—as sharply as though he had seen a ghost.

XV.

“Drink to me only with thine eyes,
And I will pledge with mine ;
Or leave a kiss but in the cup,
And I'll not look for wine.
The thirst that from the soul doth rise
Doth ask a drink divine ;
But might I of Jove's nectar sup
I would not change for thine.”

“YES, it is me,” says she (regardless of grammar). “I have come to tell you all about it.”

“About what ?” His face is now as white as her own, and that is saying a great deal for it.

“You know—— That is—*do* you know ?” asks she, that old doubt returning.

“Even if I do, don't let us talk out here : it is miserably cold. Come in.”

“No—no. Let me tell you here.” (“Where you can't see me,” she would have added, had she dared.)

“As you will, of course ; but it is madness. It is the coldest night we have had yet ; and there is a fire within—and——”

“You did not seem to feel it too cold to come out a few minutes ago,” says she.

“How do you know I came out ?”

"I saw you. I was looking out of the window. And . . . I have wanted all day to see you alone. . . ."

"To see *me* alone? For the first time in your life, surely!" with sudden bitterness.

"Oh—never mind all that now," says she, with a touch of impatience that is full of despair. "At all events, I *did* want to see you, to—to tell you the truth about . . ."

"Don't go on—*don't*, if it hurts you!" says he hoarsely.

"Hurts me? Oh! it is more than that," says she, in a stifled tone. "It is so bad that I can't *live* until I tell you."

"Tell it, then," says he, freezing again. Her grief! Her misery! And such strong grief that it seems to shake her slender frame to its very soul. And all for that other!

And thus bidden, she tells it. A most halting, woeful tale; but true in every point. *So* true, indeed, that it defeats itself. It does not lay clear the fact that love for him, and want of love for his rival, had been the motive power that worked her return.

There is a dead silence when she has finished her forlorn confession.

"So you were afraid to go in the long run?" says he at last, his voice stern.

"Afraid! No,—Yes." She had begun boldly, but now breaks down. "Yes, I was afraid."

"And why have you told me this?"

"Oh! must I answer *that*?" says she, clasping her cold hands in front of her. "Surely you know. Do you think I have not seen enough to—— Do you think I am without all feeling? I spoke—to set you free!"

"*So* anxious for your own freedom?" says he, with a

sneer. He flings the now cold cigar over the balcony, away into the dark beyond. "You are ingenuousness itself! To put it upon me is a good move. Well! And so I am to consider our engagement at an end?"

"Of course," says she very bravely; and in another moment, to her intense discomfiture, finds that she is crying bitterly—silently—desperately. So silent is her crying that, in the darkness, he is not aware of it.

"I think you could have found an easier, not to say more graceful way out of your difficulty," says he contemptuously. "A word to me would have been enough. But I suppose I was not worth even so much trouble to the girl who had promised to marry me? You *had* promised, you know" (trying to see her face, and speaking with merciless persistency). "Did you imagine"—bitterly—"that I was so enamoured of you that I would *force* you into a marriage with me? Did you believe me"—passionately—"so mean a hound that I would marry you against your *will*? Great Heaven, what a world it is!" He turns suddenly away from her stricken figure, and begins to pace vehemently up and down the balcony.

"Here! come in," says he at last, roughly. "Come in out of this cold. Faithless and worthless as I think you and *know* you!—still, you must live, I suppose, to the undoing of other men."

He has laid his hand on her arm, and drawn her to the open casement. The lights from within falling more distinctly on her face waken him to the fact that the tears are running down her cheeks.

"You are *crying*!" says he fiercely. He lets her go. Crying—for Eyre! He curbs his passion by a supreme

effort, and once again addresses her. His voice now is under control, though his eyes still show the angry grief that is consuming him.

"If you are crying for Eyre," says he, "that can soon be set right. To judge by his manner last night——"

He has betrayed himself! As if struck, the girl starts back from him.

"You were *there*!—You saw!—You heard!"

"I saw: I did not hear."

"You *knew*, and let me speak! Oh!——"

"Why should I not be silent? I waited——"

"Waited? For what? Could not you" (wildly) "have broken our engagement, instead of leaving *me* to do it?"

"I could not." If she had not been so overpowered with this fresh knowledge, that meant so much fresh shame, she might have read between the lines of his short answer.

"Oh; you should—you *should*!" says she, weeping openly now.

"Don't cry," says Anketell, catching hold of her. "*Don't!* Am I not miserable enough? It can all soon be set right."

"Oh, never! Never!"

"I tell you yes. You know his address?"

"His?"

"Eyre's."

"No."

"It can easily be discovered, however."

"I don't want to discover it," says she, covering her face with her hands.

"Then why are you crying?" asks he coldly. "Let us, now that the truth lies bare between us, cease from

deception. Tell me this" (his tone growing almost frozen now): "when you proposed to leave your home with him, where were you going?"

"To his sister, Lady Stanning" (faintly).

"She had arranged to receive you?"

"Oh no! He—he only settled about our going the morning before I—I—left. *When* was it?" (wearily). "It seems a long, long time ago."

"I dare say" (grimly). "But a telegram will bring him to you in no time. Well, and so you were to go to Lady Stanning, in the middle of the night, without previous arrangement with her of any sort?"

"So he said."

"Did it never occur to you that Lady Stanning might not be exactly pleased to receive an unknown young lady at an hour approaching midnight?"

"I did not think—I——"

"And he" (with growing wrath)—"this precious lover of yours—did *he* never think either? Did it never dawn upon his vacant brain what a *cul de sac* he was leading you into? Pah! Mr. Eyre may be the model of all virtue, all genius in your eyes: in mine he is merely a first-class idiot!"

"Oh, yes!" agrees she, with a sob.

Anketell stops as if struck. He had expected vituperation—tears—abuse—support of Eyre. But *this*—this open agreement with the verdict against him—is more than he had prepared himself to receive!

"But he was very kind—very," says Dulcie hurriedly. "He was kind to me when you—when every one was against me. If—if I had liked him a little bit more, I

should have been glad to go with him ; but——” She lifts her earnest, half-drowned eyes to his.

“ But —— ? ” questions he sternly.

“ But—*I didn’t* ! ” returns she gently.

To disbelieve her would be to be a fool ! Anketell’s face pales for a moment, and then slowly, slowly a healthier, happier hue returns to it.

“ Come in,” says he gently. He does not wait for her to obey him this time, however. He draws her with a strong if tender arm to the shelter of the warm room within.

“ See here, Dulcie,” says he, standing before her, and taking her hands gently in his own. “ Shall we begin all over again, you and I ? ”

“ You and I ? ”

“ Why not ? Look ! I set you free—I release you ” (pressing her back from him). Not *very* far, but still far enough for him to know that Dulcinea’s fingers have tightened over his, as if in fear or protest, or both. Even *such* a little distance has frightened her. Oh, the glad thrill of dawning hope that heats his veins, as he feels the nervous clasping of her hands !

“ You are free, Dulcie. I have no smallest claim upon you. You can go your way, and I mine. You ” (unsteadily) “ you *quite* understand that ? ”

“ Yes ” (faintly).

“ Well—now ” (he pauses as if afraid to go on. After all it is only an experiment. Who knows how it will end ?). “ Now—I propose to you all over again. I beg, I *entreat* you to marry me ! You have your freedom ; you can keep me, or let me go, as you will ; but ” (passionately) “ I beseech you to keep me ! ”

"Oh no!" Her pretty head is hanging down, her voice has sunk into a whisper. "Not after—after—that——?"

"After that—after everything!"

Miss McDermot raises her head slowly, and looks at him. Reproach is in her glance.

"Why—*why* were you not like this always?" asks she.

"How could I be?" The reproach is all on his side now, and is strong enough to dwarf hers. "Do you know how you treated me? What icicle was ever colder? Why, I was afraid to go near you! Once I kissed you. Do you remember it? *I* do; and your look after it. Once only! This" (stooping and pressing his lips lightly to her cheek) "is the second time. And" (sadly) "I do not call that kissing you at all."

"And what do you call it?" asks she, a gleam of mischievous fun creeping into her face in spite of her. Then suddenly she flings her arms around his neck. "Well, I'll kiss *you*," says she. "Because I love you, Ralph. I do! I do *indeed*!"

* * * * *

"You are sure of it?" asks he five minutes later.

"Quite, *quite* sure."

"I wish you had been sure a little earlier."

"I shouldn't. The waiting has made it ever so much surer."

"And you are happy, darling?"

"I *never* felt so happy!"

"Not even one regret?"

"Well" (nervously), "there *is* something—something——" (fidgeting awkwardly with the flower in his coat).

"Yes, something? Go on," says he anxiously. (*Can it be about Eyre!*)

"It's—— He seemed very uneasy about it."

"So he very well might" (indignantly).

"Oh, but it was all for *me*!"

"All for himself, in my opinion!"

"You wrong him" (warmly). "You do indeed!"

To hear her stick up for Eyre is gall and wormwood; but to shake the good feeling established between them now is not to be thought of for a moment.

"Well, don't let us quarrel about him," says he, his tone lightness itself—his heart as heavy as lead. "What was he uneasy about in especial?"

"About the—the lies he told you!"

"*He? Who?*"

"Why, poor Andy, of course! Whom were you thinking of?"

"Of Eyre. Forgive me that."

"Nonsense," says Miss McDermot. "Why" (airily), "I've *forgotten* him. No, it is Andy! You know he told you last night that he had brought me to the station, and, as I told you, I——"

"Is that all?"

"Yes. It was a great deal. And Andy is greatly put out about it. You—you are sure you don't think badly of him?"

"I think" (enthusiastically) "very highly of him!"

"Oh! Do you really?"

"Why, how else should I think of him? Was he not trying to help you?"

"And you will say something lovely to him the very first thing in the morning?"

"No: I shall say something lovely to you then."

"Oh, *Ralph* . . . Well, good night. . . . Good night again. . . . Good night *really*, this time!"

WHEN WE TWO PARTED.

THEY had been married only three months when the great shock came; and then had followed nine months of silence, of distance, of absolute ignorance. Had an ocean rolled between them they could not have been farther apart; and in truth the ocean might so have rolled for all he knew. Where she was was quite unknown to him. She might even be dead—but on this he did not permit himself to dwell.

When the fatal truth was treacherously made known to her, she flung up all ties and deliberately left him. She was almost a child then, a tall, slender thing of eighteen; but he had been so overwhelmed by pride, despair and anger, that he had refused to permit himself to follow her. More, he had positively declined to make even the most cursory inquiries, and had let her slip out of his life; not weakly, but with a steady purpose.

He was a proud man, to whom publicity of any sort about his private affairs and the gossip of his county meant torture. He had at first thought it possible to live it all down, to endure it; but his strength failed him, and eventually he had gone abroad with the hope of compelling travel and change to deaden, and finally overcome, the misfortune that had darkened his days.

But this hope failed him. Change, travel, everything proved insufficient to kill the gnawing anger and regret that filled his soul, and finally he dropped back again upon London, possessed always by a vague, yet unspoken, unacknowledged longing to find her again in some way, in some place, and compel her to forgive.

In his more youthful days he had been—well, indiscreet—that kindly word that covers such a multitude of early follies. He had certainly suppressed that old story when marrying the woman—the child—who had forsaken him; but then, how few men have had the courage to show up the peccadilloes that belonged to their bachelor days! And she, the wife, had been such a child, and that old story so past, so gone, so dead, and so little in it when all was told and a boy's infatuation allowed for, that it had scarcely seemed worth while, even for honour's sake, to drag it into a brighter light once more.

He had so learnt to regard it as out of date, as so altogether belonging to a period where foolish youth alone held sway, that when the evil heroine of it had risen again to the surface, and insisted on his recognition of her, he had been surprised at the depth of the loathing she had awakened within his breast.

And then she, the wife, the charming child he had married, had learned all, and had with indignant hands thrust him from her. He should never forget that scene, or her pale, scornful face: the little white hands upraised against him, for the first time forbidding him to come nearer; the outraged, shining eyes; the young, stern lips, so unforgiving!

She had thrown him to one side as something worthless,

and had gone forth into the world—whither, he knew not.

It was small comfort to him to know that she had a little money of her own—a paltry hundred a year. But at first, in his wrath, he had dwelt on this, and had persuaded himself that he was well rid of her—of one who could forsake him without question asked or answered ; of one who had apparently never loved him—and as she had elected to go her own way he need not trouble himself about her, as no one need starve, at least, on that sum.

Then had come the reaction, the agony of fear, of remorse, when he had sought eagerly to find her, only to discover that he had delayed too long, and that she was as dead to him as though the earth indeed lay over her. She had removed the little money she had from the securities of which he knew, and had indeed successfully killed all traces that might lead to her identification.

Then all at once a passion of fear seized upon him. He pictured her to himself as miserable, dying, in want ; *she*, who had once been everybody's darling, who had had all that this world could give, who had never known what it was to ask in vain for anything. Pride died within him, and he sought by all and every means to discover her. But advertisements proved abortive, private agents were at fault, and but two possibilities lay open to him, either that she was dead, or so far unforgiving that she obstinately refrained from taking notice of his overtures.

A touch of recklessness grew on him after that. He stayed on in London, knocking about in an aimless fashion, avoiding his clubs and all old acquaintances, hardly caring

what became of him : a man without a purpose, a desire, or a hope !

• • • • •

It is a dull evening, heavily warm, drowsily damp. A drizzle, as yet light, is making the air unpleasant. Through the yellow fog the glare of the lamps shows dimly, and the moist pavement grows each moment muddier beneath the feet of the crowd that is ever coming and going.

For Bouverie the unwholesome growth of this wet September night has a sort of fascination. He had dismissed his cab a moment since, and plunged with a sort of eagerness into the soft drifting rain that is already showing symptoms of a coming storm. All day his mind has dwelt upon his evil fortunes, upon the woman who has wrecked his life, with a pertinacity not to be subdued ; every hour has given her back to him in her fresh sweet beauty, her bright and buoyant youthfulness, and each hour, alas ! has told him that she is lost to him for ever. Filled with a desire to kill these haunting thoughts, he had left his hotel, with the intention of spending his evening in some theatre, and on his way there, tempted by the fog and mist, that seemed so entirely in unison with his miserable musings, had got out of his hansom, and pursued his way through the motley crowd that thronged the dingy place where the theatre he sought was situated.

With head bent, regardless of his evening clothes and the drifting rain that is ruining his shirt, he strides onwards, hardly conscious of the hurrying people who push him from side to side. One thought is always in his mind, the same face ever before him—the face that has followed him,

tormented him all day. And now suddenly—*suddenly*, without a second's preparation, he sees it !

The lights flaring out from a greengrocer's shop show it to him ! She is coming towards him quickly, with a light step, but not so light as it once had been. In spite of himself he makes a startled movement, and she, being close to him, catches this agitation of his, and lifts her eyes.

For a long, *long* time, as it seems to them, they stare at each other blankly ; through the dull mist, the driving rain, there rises beyond the shadowy picture of a lost life. Quite motionless they stand, stricken to stone, as it were, and then they are hustled to and fro by the small world around them, and past memories die and present memories come back with a cruel vehemence. He is the first to speak :

" Well, don't you think you are about tired of all this ? " says he, in a slow, grinding sort of way.

He had fancied to himself many times that if he should ever chance to meet her he should not be able to speak—emotion would choke him. Yet, now that he is face to face with her, he feels hardly any emotion, only a dull wonder at the want of it, and a duller sort of passion, that might perhaps mean anger.

His words fall from him jerkily, almost roughly. She is looking worn, but not ill ; and it slowly grows upon him as he stares at her that there is some new, undefinable difference in her. When they parted she had been a girl,—now she is a woman ; but even this explanation does not account for the soft, still light that shines in her eyes and seems in some vague way to alter and glorify every feature. She had been pretty, charming, *altogether* charming when he

married her : now she is beautiful ! Looking, he wonders greatly, but his scrutiny brings him no knowledge.

As for her, she had stopped dead short when their eyes had met across those glancing lights from the shop, and now turns so white that he fears she is going to faint.

"You are ill," he says hurriedly.

"Ill ?—*No !*"

Her tone, though low, is steady, and there is something in it, something scornful, that increases in him that first wild impulse towards anger.

"You look it," he says shortly, with a frown. "Don't you think you have had enough of this? Don't you think you had better——" (he pauses a moment, and then flings the words at her as though defying her)—"*come home ?*"

"I am going there," returns she steadily, coldly.

She moves away from him and continues her walk down the dingy street as though he had never been. Following her, with that odd, still anger growing into a fuller life, he notices her clothes. The contrast between them and his own strikes him like a touch of fire. He, dressed in gala costume, going to enjoy himself somewhere, though God knows there was small enjoyment in the thought ; and she——

Well, she is plainly dressed, respectably dressed—very, *very* respectably. Great heavens ! how *terribly* respectable is that black, straight gown ! He brings his teeth together with a sharp click, and gains her side. It seems to him as if his strange anger has gained in force.

"Very good," he says. "If it is home you are going, then I'll go with you."

"What do you mean?" demands she sharply. There is something fierce in the glance she turns on him. A colour has come into her cheek—a light into her eyes.

"That as my home is yours, so is yours mine. I——"

"Your home shall never be mine, nor mine yours. Be sure of that," returns she calmly, yet with a calmness that belies itself, that speaks of repression. Her step grows faster as the words pass her lips, as though her body is keeping pace with the passionate thoughts that surge within her.

"Why not?" persists he, unmoved. "You cannot go on like this for ever; and if you can, I cannot. I confess you are necessary to me. And there has been no separation—nothing. If you choose to live in an attic, why—I'll choose to live there too."

"How dare you speak to me like this!" cries she, with a sudden burst of wrath. "You forget women are not altogether defenceless nowadays. The law will protect me! If you persist in this persecution, I shall appeal to it. *It* will compel you to leave me in peace."

"If it insists upon anything, it will insist on your returning to my care," replies he stonily.

"*Your* care! *Yours*!" says she contemptuously.

"Well? *Did* I not care for you during those three short months you were good enough to remain with me? If you tired, it was not my fault: at least, you must acknowledge that I did my best; that I——"

"Cease that!" says she vehemently. "Was ever woman so insulted, so cruelly used as I was? From the very beginning you wilfully deceived me. If even some word had been said—— But—— You married me, a mere baby, as" (bitterly) "you often called me—a *fool*, as I

know now!" She pauses, and draws a long, deep breath—an accumulation of many sighs, as it might seem to one who was friends with sorrow. "You married me," she goes on presently, "professing to love me whilst all the time you loved another."

"That is not the truth," returns he coldly. "I loved no other."

"Do you think *still* that you have only to speak for me to believe? That day is past. I know you now. Will you" (turning to him, and letting her eyes for the first time dwell of her own free will on his)—"will you also deny that you met—that woman—once—twice, *three* times, during those three short months of our married life?"

"That is not the truth, either. I met her once only. Once—because it was best I should do so. I did not meet her willingly."

"Let us say unwillingly, then," returns she, with a faint curl of her short lip. "A word here and there is really of no consequence."

A pause ensues. Silently they move together through the wet drizzle of the half-lit street, absently watching the lamps as they flare and flicker in the growing wind.

"You cannot go on like this," exclaims he suddenly; "it is impossible. *You!* What place is this?" (with a sharp glance round him, as though just awakening to the sense of the squalor of his surroundings). "What brings you here?"

"I live near here" (calmly).

"Here! *Here!*" Strong but suppressed agitation renders his voice harsh, and once again that old feeling of anger, that might be pain, almost overpowers him. "How do you live?" demands he, turning his face to hers.

"Respectably, I *assure* you," says she bitterly. "You forget that I have some money of my own. Quite a large income for any one who lives in this part of the world. I have had time given me to learn that it is quite possible not to starve on a hundred a year; that it is even possible to be comfortable on it. It seems to me" (with a short, unmirthful laugh) "that I have learned to grow strong and fat on it."

"I am afraid you overrate your learning: you have grown thin," returns he brusquely.

To this she makes no answer. They have now indeed come to a turn in the long, narrow, squalid street, a turn that leads into another, quieter and less given up to the flaring of gas-jets from the shop windows; and here she comes to a standstill. "No farther!" is written upon her brow.

"At least let me see you to your home," says he earnestly.

"No."

"What?" hotly, irritated by her forbidding tone. "Are you ashamed of it?" Once said, he feels it to be a despicable speech, yet he will not withdraw it. His despair and grief and indignation have carried him away, and he tells himself savagely that he would say a worse thing to her, if by so doing he could break through the cold armour of indifference in which she has encased herself.

"Ashamed? I have nothing to be ashamed of," says she quietly. "There" (pointing to a door far down on the opposite side of the street)—"there, if you will know it, is where I live—'No. 4.'"

"Will you not ask me in, now we are so near?" says he, looking directly at her. For the first time since their

meeting, a touch of wistfulness, of entreaty, that would be passionate but for the strong pressure he has laid upon himself, appears upon his face, and enters into his tone.

It *should* have softened her ; but the contrary effect only is obtained. A look of actual terror grows within her eyes—a terror out of all proportion to the cause of it. To her husband, gazing steadily at her, it is as much a puzzle as that first great change he had seen in her that made her woman instead of girl ; and for one instant a doubt of her takes possession of him and shakes him physically and mentally. It seems to cut through his heart like the keen, sharp blade of a knife.

But he flings it from him. No. A thousand times *no* ! Whatever that unmistakable fear might mean, it had nothing to do with shame.

"I will not have it," she says, in a low panting tone. "You shall not enter my doors. The hour you do I shall leave them for ever."

There is such determined hostility in her whole bearing that he gives in to it. Making her a slight gesture of farewell, he turns abruptly away and leaves her. For fully a minute she stands watching his swiftly retreating figure, noting the fact that he never once looks back, until a distant curve in the street hides him from view, and then she too turns away, moving in a sort of blind fashion to the nearest shop window. There is nothing more pathetic in it than a few moth-eaten wigs, fitfully suggestive of a worn-out theatrical existence ; but as she stands gazing at them, apparently lost in contemplation of their absurdity, the tears run swiftly down her cheeks.

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But for him tears are impossible. A very rage of misery makes his footsteps fleet, as he goes down the wretched street where their chance encounter had taken place. Life, so far as he can see, has come to an end for him. She certainly had never loved him. Never!—that was his first thought. She had shrunk from him. There had been positive abhorrence in her glance. She had probably been glad of the excuse afforded her by that old story to leave him. If ever a spark of affection for him had awakened within her breast, she would have condoned that one offence—would have accused, but pardoned. But in her there was no sign of relenting. She was hard. She was granite.

As he walks mile after mile through the rain, that is now coming down in torrents, not caring, not knowing where his feet are carrying him, this thought, that she never loved him, keeps him forlorn company. And then, after a bit his mind wanders still farther back, and he wonders, if he had told her all at first—the entire truth about that wild, foolish, boyish infatuation—would things have been different? There were times when, surely, she had *seemed* to care!

He thinks this over, looking at it in many lights, and always coming to the same decision. No; he could not have told her. It was the one thing that her unlearned youth, proud and unstained and unknowing of evil, would not have glossed over. The cruelty of youth surpasses all other—it makes no allowance, leaves room for no excuse. It refuses all kindly coverings; rigid, austere, almost brutal in its pure severity, Draco-like it would name Death, and Death only, as fit punishment for any fall from the path of virtue.

And then, another thing, she had been such a child, a mere baby, fresh from the schoolroom, barely introduced, hardly awake to the fact that evil lay within the lovely world on which her large soft eyes were for the first time gazing. Was he—her lover—to be the one to enlighten her? No. He knew if it were to come all over again, he could not do it.

* * * * *

To sleep little is to wake unrefreshed and with loss of vigour; but to Bouverie, although he had paced his room all night, the morning brings a sense of hope and courage. It finds him full of purpose, and strong in a resolution to conquer all difficulties. Two words that she had spoken stand before him as though written in the empty air: "No. 4." Yes; he will go and see her in spite of her prohibition. He will plead with her once more. There is so much that he can say. And he had been harsh with her last evening—had taken a wrong tone altogether. When she hears everything, surely she will forgive.

Filled with this supreme desire to lay bare his heart to her and gain her pardon, he mounts the stairs leading to her rooms. Stairs clean, but terribly suggestive of poverty. Surely with even that paltry hundred a year she could have managed to live in some place more comfortable! His soul sickens within him as he notes each meagre detail, that tells its own story of grinding want. Taking the handle of the door, he summons up all his courage and enters the room.

There is no one in it, except a small, solemn-looking girl of fifteen or so, evidently a servant. Bouverie, with a sense of disappointment mingled with relief strong upon him, addresses her somewhat sharply.

"You can go!" he says, pointing to the door. The girl courtesies deeply, respectfully, if in a rather amazed way, but hesitates.

"Yes, sir; but——" she begins, casting a nervous glance towards the corner of the room.

"You can go!" repeats Bouverie peremptorily. He has made up his mind to stay here until his wife's return, and a desire to find himself alone, in the room that has meant home to her for so long, is strong upon him.

The girl, with another nervous glance, opens the door, and going out closes it reluctantly behind her.

Slowly his glance travels round the room, noting each object in it. Nothing is familiar. She had evidently taken from her old home no smallest treasure to help her to remember. Doubtless she was glad to forget! He smiles bitterly.

What miserable furniture! What an abominable fire-place! And for her—who had been accustomed to all things delicate and dainty! How they must hurt her eyes! What chairs! What a table! What——

What is *that*? His glance seems glued to the corner over there. Has he mistaken the room? No; it had been specially pointed out to him. What, then, *is* that?

He had seated himself on one of the despised chairs; but now he rises, strides across the room, and stares down at *it*. In it lies a little lovely waxen image of himself.

Great heaven! His own child! His—and hers! Not for one moment does he fail to understand this. His child, and she had said nothing. He turns very white, and a curious expression grows round his lips. All at once he remembers that strange change in her he had noticed last

evening when they met. It is explained now. The sacred fire of motherhood had shone in her eyes, and he had not known it. He, who was a father, had not known. He had not been told. A heavy sigh breaks from him. Verily she had cared but little for him.

But kindlier thoughts drive out this bitter one. It seems so marvellous: that little creature lying there, so calm, so quiescent, so blissful,—a little dream, as it were. And she, his wife, the child he had married, was a mother! It seems the most wonderful of all things. And all so new, so strange, so—sweet. He is filled with conflicting thoughts, when he hears the door open behind him, and turning, finds himself looking at *her*.

If he is so pale, so is she—ghastly.

“So,” she says, standing just inside the threshold, and speaking in a little panting way, “in spite of what I said—that your coming would drive me forth—you have come.”

“Don’t take it like that, Bessy,” says he, advancing towards her. Half-way, however, he pauses, and points towards the cradle. “This—this child,” he says, a note of ineffable tenderness in his voice, “is mine.”

“He is *mine*!” retorts she fiercely. “You have no claim to him.” She looks at him with a terrible defiance in her gaze—and yet half-fainting. “You cannot take him: or you *shall* not,” she says.

“Why should I take him?” (gently). “Was that your fear last night? Was that why you looked at me as you did when I asked to see you home?” (He pauses.) “You wronged me,” he says.

“If it was not that—if you heard nothing—what has

brought you?" asks she. She has got between him and the cradle, and is now regarding him sternly, fixedly, as though she would pierce his thoughts.

"To see you," returns he stolidly.

"Well, you have seen me." She makes a little pause.

"Now go," she says, very quietly.

"If you say that," says Bouverie,—“if you say it now, it will mean for ever. You will not care, perhaps. On my soul”—with a passionate gesture full of grief—“that is what I believe; but in case you should care” (with a last lingering hope in his tone), “I warn you of it. *Is* that what you mean?”

She is silent.

“Speak, Bessy!” There is a suggestion of command in his whole manner that sways her and compels her to answer.

“That is what I mean,” she says stonily, her eyes lowered.

As if angered beyond control, he goes to the door, opens it, and then— Suddenly he comes back to her, and flings himself at her feet, and clasps her waist with his arms.

“It is what I *cannot* do!” he says. He presses his forehead against her gown. “My darling, try to forgive me. Bessy, *think!*” He holds her closely, and she makes no effort to break from him. Only she raises her hand to her throat as if suffocating.

Slowly he gets to his feet.

“You are silent,” he says calmly. “I suppose I know what that means, and if I didn’t your face would tell me. I don’t know how I shall go on living without you; I don’t,

really." He speaks with the extremest simplicity, but his words are rendered tragic by the agony that rings through them. "I thought I had got over it—that I should be able to go my own way and let you go yours, but yesterday the sight of your face destroyed all that. My life is nothing without you; you *are* my life. And consider how many years there have been given for man to endure!"

"Too many" (shortly).

"If you only knew what I have already suffered——"

"You! Have *I* not suffered, then?" cries she vehemently, as though the protest is torn from her.

"But not alone. You have had the child," says he, with a swift glance at the sleeping baby.

"Well, you have had—*her*!" says she contemptuously.

He makes a quick movement forward, and, laying his hands upon her shoulders, forces her so to stand that her eyes look into his.

"You don't believe that?" he says sternly. "I *defy* you to say you do. Why seek to harden yourself like this?"

"I cannot forget," says she; "that woman is ever before me. For *her* you deceived me. For her you tacitly lied to me."

"For *her*—no. I told you last evening that you——"

"Will you say," cries she passionately, "that there is no such woman in existence? Is that what it comes to? Am I *altogether* wrong? Come! *what* do you say?"

"Is man to be stainless?" says he. "Is there no pardon anywhere? If you will think of that one fault of mine, and that only, there is indeed no hope for me. And yet, *was* it so great a crime? But if you will think so, without so much as giving me a hearing, why, the sooner I am out of

this life, and you free, the better. But I will not believe it" (with a quick turn towards her). "You loved me once, surely: I *cannot* have been so mad as to have deceived myself there!" He waits for a moment, but she makes him no answer. "Can I say nothing?" says he in a low tone,—“can I *do* nothing to restore your faith? If this is to be the end of it, remember it is your doing, not mine!"

He waits for her to speak, but to her it seems that there is nothing to be said, and she remains silent, leaning against the edge of the table in her long black gown that clings to her nunlike, her eyes fixed upon the floor.

"For the child's sake, think!" says he, despising himself, yet finding it impossible to give up even the smallest chance. "How will you educate him? How bring him up to undertake the duties that lie before him? On my death he will inherit a large property; a lad should be trained to understand that—to know the tenants—to be known by them. And there are so many other things. Will you wilfully injure his future? How will you be able to prepare him for his life in his own home? How will you send him to college——"

"I am saving for that," says she coldly.

"Ah!" says he sharply—it is as if something had hurt him—"so *that* is why you live here? You are starving yourself for him; you are bringing yourself down to the very lowest depths of poverty that he may gain by it. Bessy! was *I* not there—was *I* nothing?"

"Nothing," retorts she defiantly.

"In *your* poverty you never considered that *I* had the right, too, to help him?"

She puts him aside with an expressive gesture.

"I have thought out all that," she says slowly; "but I have thought also that, however poor I may be, I can at least bring him up to be an honourable man."

"A cut at me!" says he. He lifts his hands and presses them against the back of his head—a trick of his, at which she winces—and a short laugh breaks from him. "Great heavens! how hard you can be!" he says. "But you are selfish, too: you forget the child's welfare in the nursing of your own grievance."

Something in this speech, or in the memories evoked by that old well-known gesture of his, unnerves her.

"You are wrong! I forget nothing! Oh! would to God I *could*!" cries she, with such a depth of grief within her eyes that all at once his anger dies within him, and only a mournful reproach lives in its place.

"Amen to that," he says. "But have I nothing to forgive? The child—all this time you have had him, and yet never a sign or word did you send me—*me*, his father. Not even when—— Oh!" (breaking down as he thinks of all she has suffered, alone, friendless, without one near her who knew or loved her), "my poor, *poor* girl, what you endured—and all alone! And I—I knew nothing. And when he came—when he lay within your arms—to give me no thought!"

"You are wrong. I thought of you," says she icily.

Involuntarily he lifts his eyes and looks at her. Is it indeed all over? It is a hard face truly into which he looks—hard, yet how young! It fills him with wonder to see it.

And then all at once he knows that the lips are trembling, though the rest of the face remains coldly immovable, and that the fingers clinging so tightly to the edges of the table

are trembling too ; and moved by some sudden uncontrollable impulse, he stoops over her and kisses her.

He had hardly counted the cost. For a moment she stares at him, very quietly ; but then bursts into a very storm of tears, covering her face with her hands. He can see that she is quivering in every limb, and when gently, *very* gently, he takes her in his arms she does not repulse him ; but as one overcome—as a tired child might—she lets her head fall heavily upon his shoulder.

Until his lips met hers she had not known the strength of her desire to be reconciled to him. It was a revelation so swift, so strong, that it killed at one blow all her strength.

“My heart is broken !” she whispers faintly through her sobs. It is a last protest. To it he says nothing ; only holding her closely against his beating heart, and now and again with tender touch smoothing her ruffled hair.

“Where is that woman ?” demands she suddenly. As she puts this question (so terrible to her), a cruel trembling shakes all her slender frame. She makes a movement as if to withdraw from him, but he holds her fast.

“I don’t know. It would, I suppose, be useless to tell you—what is the truth—that I don’t care. She went somewhere abroad with Allerton last week, so I’ve been told. You met him, I think, once.”

“Lord Allerton ! She did not love you, then !” cries she, with a strange note of exultation in her voice.

“She ! She could love no man ; and as for *me* !—I was a mere boy, a puppet in her hands ; my money was my only charm. When I look back upon that boy now, I loathe, I despise him a thousand times more deeply than ever you can. It was an infatuation ; one unaccountable—one I

would almost die now to be able to forget." His voice has grown very sad. He looks at her entreatingly. "It was only six months out of my whole life; and I was only twenty-one. It is eight years ago. Do not" (the pressure of his hand grows tighter over hers)—"*do* not let it come between us, sweetheart."

She sighs heavily.

"I wish I had not heard of it," she says.

"No? Well, I am glad you heard," says he quickly. "In those first days when we met—and *loved*"—this he feels to be a bold stroke, and he looks at her with an earnest expectancy—a hope, that is scarcely one, that is rewarded! Something in the lovely light within her eyes—fixed on his—tells him that day is dawning with him for a life even rarer and fuller than that old one with her! "Well, then I was afraid to tell you. It was the one shadow between us; but now there is nothing. There *is* nothing?" asks he intensely.

She hesitates—she would have spoken, perhaps, but at this moment a little pathetic cry rings through the room. It comes from the cradle!

Releasing herself from his embrace, she runs to the cradle, and, stooping, lifts the baby and catches him to her breast. Her whole face grows transfigured and filled with a blissful light.

Bouverie, who has followed her, bends over the child.

"He is like you," she says very shyly.

"You had him all this time, and never once thought of me—of my empty heart," says he. It is his one great reproach. Looking up swiftly, she sees that his eyes are full of tears.

"Oh ! do not think it !" she cries. "At times the silence seemed *more* than I could bear. My heart went back—I could see each room, each spot. And always—*always*" (she pauses as if struggling with herself) "always I wanted to *show* him to you !" The simple admission comes so softly, so sweetly, so truly, that Bouverie's heart knows certainty at last.

"Yesterday," says he, "you said that if ever I entered this room, you would leave it. Fulfil that vow now."

"Now ?"

"This moment. Why not ? You have your—*our*—boy in your arms : bring him home."

She hesitates for a long while, as if struck by the magnitude of this idea—as if dwelling, too, upon thoughts too long grown intimate to be cast aside at a breath. As she hesitates she looks at him. Something in the pallor, the anxiety of his face—something in the fact that he is a good deal thinner than of yore—moves her to acquiescence, and yet she shrinks ; but now—unconsciously almost—the father has put his hand towards the little son—the baby fingers have closed tightly round it. Bouverie, thus caught, looks once again at her.

"Yes. Let us go home !" says she.

“SANS-CULOTTE.”

THE hot sun is beating madly down upon the tennis court, although June is still young, and one reasonably expects a little mercy from old King Sol. The day, however, is not warmer than the dispute so evidently being carried on between two young men standing at the lower end of the court. They had not been playing—lounging rather ; and it is easily to be seen that one of them, at all events, would be glad to give up the disputation and go on lounging instead. He is a tall man of about twenty-nine or thirty, with a face that must be called, if not handsome, certainly distinguished. Just now he looks bored to death, and is evidently wishing his companion, his cousin, twenty miles away, to put it mildly. Indeed, to Sir Rupert Walton, the mere fact of his being engaged against his will in an argument, the subject of which is the girl who to him is above all other women, renders the discussion hateful.

“My dear fellow, it is really becoming quite a mania with you,” says he at last, when he has discovered that persistent silence is of no use whatever.

“You may call it any name you like,” says his cousin, Mark Walton, with a frown. “You have, at all events, been compelled to understand that I love Gwendoline

Hastings, and will suffer no interference where she is concerned."

He is not so tall a man as Sir Rupert, but infinitely better looking. He is, indeed, distinctly handsome—dark as an Italian, and with fiery, beautiful eyes. He is a barrister, practising in London, and making a name for himself there, not only surely but swiftly. He is a direct contrast to Sir Rupert, who is fair, and somewhat indolent in manner.

"You mean by that, I presume, that you will resent the attentions of any other man? That is unfortunate, my dear Mark, as a great many other men are likely to see the charms in Miss Hastings that *you* see." Sir Rupert laughs a little contemptuously as he ceases speaking, and lets a light sneer curve his lip as he knocks the ash off his cigar. "There is something absurd about the way in which you take it," says he.

"Sneer as you will," says the other, now at a white heat, "I tell you I mean to win her, by foul means if not by fair. Don't imagine" (turning upon Sir Rupert a face that has grown positively livid) "that I have been blind to the fact that for the last three weeks you have been trying to undermine my friendship with Miss Hastings. You have been making love to her—you *know* you have; you" (violently) "have set yourself the pleasing, *honourable* task of cutting me out—of——"

"What do you mean?" says Sir Rupert, his fair face flushing and his calm mouth taking an angry expression. "What are you to her, that you dare to speak like that? Are you her accepted lover? Tell me that the marriage is arranged between you, and I will cease my attentions."

"You admit, then" (furiously), "that you *are* a suitor for her hand?"

"Certainly" (coldly). "That can scarcely be news to you, or any one else in the county."

Mark Walton turns upon him savagely.

"I can see through you," says he. "You want money, and she——"

"A truce—a truce, I beseech you!" says Sir Rupert, with rather a fine smile. "You surely are not desirous that Miss Hastings herself should be present at this most unseemly dispute?" He points towards the avenue, where at the hall door an open landau has just drawn up.

"Ah! there she is, by Jove!" says his cousin, screwing his glass into his eye. His excitement seems to have quite calmed down. "I say, Rupert, no malice, you know. You—you won't——"

Sir Rupert for answer turns his blue eyes full upon him. There is disgust as well as scorn in his swift glance. Then both men walk eagerly forward to the hall door, where a stout, elderly lady having descended to the ground, a tall, young, pretty creature is following her.

Such a slight, graceful girl! She seems to spring to the earth rather than to step to it, and, looking back gaily, says something and laughs merrily at the little girl who descends after her. The latter is a pretty child of fourteen—her sister.

"How d'ye do, Miss Hastings?" says Sir Rupert, hurrying up. "Not in time, I see" (smiling at Katherine Hastings—the child—who smiles back at him, and, with the unerring instinct of childhood, that teaches one whom to trust *at once*, has already thrust her arm into his). "I

had hoped to be able to help Katherine—from the carriage." He sends a quick, somewhat impassioned glance at Miss Hastings as he says this; but she is engaged talking to his cousin, and, if she hears him, finds it impossible to answer him.

Mrs. Hastings has already entered the house, and is lost to view.

"Come, Katherine," says Miss Hastings, preparing to follow her mother.

"It is so warm! *Must* you go in? No, *don't*. Come and have a game of tennis instead," says Mark Walton eagerly.

Miss Hastings hesitates.

"Yes. *Do* come," says Sir Rupert. "Katherine hates stuffy rooms in June: don't you, Katherine?"

"You may say *that*!" says Miss Katherine, with such honest feeling that they all burst out laughing.

"Well, *I* should like a game, too, whilst mamma is paying a visit to Lady Walton," says Gwendoline, half shyly, half anxiously,—"*if*" (with a fleeting glance at Sir Rupert) "*you don't mind.*"

"Oh, *I* don't mind," says he, returning that fleeting glance with interest.

They play for half an hour or so—for nearly an hour, indeed—Miss Hastings changing sides, and showing herself impartially kind to both the young men.

"There! I sha'n't play any more!" cries she at last, flinging her racquet on the ground beside her. "I shall be tired if I do, and I want to enjoy myself to-night. We shall all meet at Lady Daintree's ball, eh?" (glancing calmly from one cousin to the other).

"Yes," says Sir Rupert.

"I hadn't meant to go; but if you are really to be there——" begins Mark, stopping meaningly.

"I shall certainly be there," says Miss Hastings, smiling. At this moment her mother, appearing on the doorstep, waves her handkerchief lightly to her daughters.

"There is mamma! We must go home!" cries little Katherine Hastings to her sister. "Why, *why* can't we have a quiet game like this *all day long*, without being ordered here and there?" Discontent rings through her young voice. They all laugh.

"If I sent you a special invitation next week, Kitty, would you promise to devote an entire afternoon to me and tennis?" asks Sir Rupert.

"Oh! *wouldn't* I, though!" returns she enthusiastically. Sir Rupert draws her hand within his arm, and laughs again. Miss Hastings has gone on a little bit in front, accompanied by Mark. There are some words to be said to Lady Walton, who is standing on the hall doorsteps, and then Sir Rupert gives Gwendoline his hand as she steps into the carriage.

Even after she is seated he retains it, and his pressure grows warmer.

"I shall see you to-night." His tone is agitated, hurried, and a bare whisper. "There is something I would say. . . . You will listen. . . . You will answer?"

His usually calm face is disturbed; his eyes seek hers eagerly.

The girl casts a swift glance at him, a soft flush rising to her cheeks. She hesitates. She *would* have spoken, perhaps but that at this moment Mrs. Hastings rustles up to the carriage, and Sir Rupert has of course to turn and

show her some courtesy. There are a few more kindly words, and then the carriage drives away.

Sir Rupert, having seen it disappear up the drive, turns as if to enter the house, when his cousin's voice arrests him. Mark, who had been standing near the carriage unseen by Sir Rupert, had heard the few hurried sentences he had addressed to Gwendoline.

"One moment," says he.

"As many as you please," replies the other courteously, if entirely without cordiality.

"I heard what you said to Miss Hastings," exclaims Mark, his naturally fiery temper now getting the better of him. "After my late conversation with you, I regard it as a breach of even the commonest decency to have spoken to her as you did."

"There has been enough of this, I think," says Sir Rupert coldly. "Miss Hastings is not bound to you in any way. I gave you warning a while since that many another man besides you would——"

"I am to conclude," interrupts Mark passionately, "by what you said, that you intend proposing formally to her to-night?"

Sir Rupert stares at him.

"You may conclude anything you like," returns he haughtily. "I am certainly not going to answer such a question as that."

"That is tantamount to an admission. Silence gives consent. I warn you (I am fairer than *you* are, you see), that I also intend to ask Miss Hastings to-night to marry me."

Sir Rupert merely shrugs his shoulders : he has reasons—

or believes he has—for knowing that his cousin's chances are small. Yet it is impossible to pity him.

The shrug enrages Mark.

"You think the running is all your own?" says he furiously. "You can afford to sneer at me, can you? But an impecunious baronet, who is naturally on the look-out for a moneyed alliance, is not nowadays of overwhelming importance, in spite of his old name, and older house that is crumbling about his ears."

Sir Rupert keeps his temper admirably.

"I have given you a good many minutes now," says he. "Have you done? Anything more to say?"

"Yes, *this*. That I think a barrister in good practice, with a name equal to your own, save for the idle handle attached to yours, is as likely to be acceptable nowadays as anything you can offer. Why" (insolently), "I am not even sure that your income is as large as mine!"

"I have no doubt," says Sir Rupert calmly, "that it is smaller. Done yet?"

"If larger, I have a better chance than you."

"You make Miss Hastings a very mercenary person—in your *own* mind."

"Never mind what I think of her. The question is this—will you acknowledge I have as good a chance with her as you have?"

"Quite. So has any other man."

"You mean that?"

Sir Rupert nods.

"You lie, then!" cries the other, losing all control over himself. "You *don't* think it: you believe you have it all your own way with her. Yet you don't love her. I could

swear to that. You are a cold-blooded fellow! You don't even honestly *care* for her. One heiress would be the same to you as another. You have set your heart (what you are pleased to *call* your heart) upon Miss Hastings, chiefly because she is the one most convenient to you; but——"

"My good fellow, don't you think you had better go indoors?" says Sir Rupert contemptuously.

"That is your way of putting things aside. You can't deny, however, that you know she *is* an heiress."

"It is the last thing any one would remember when looking at her," says Sir Rupert slowly, tenderly.

"Very highflown!" says his cousin, with an open sneer. "Well, you know all now, and I know too; and I warn you I shall checkmate you—if I can."

"If you can."

"Is that a threat?" (angrily). "Is Miss Hastings so much your own that——?"

"You are forgetting yourself," says Sir Rupert, with a sudden sternness that moves even Mark Walton. "I decline to discuss Miss Hastings further with you, either now or in the future. If she does me the honour of accepting me to-night, well and good for me; if, on the contrary, she accepts you——" He pauses, and then, "Why, if so, you will be the happiest man alive, in my estimation. It all lies there in a nutshell."

He turns as if to move away.

"End it so, by all means!" cries Mark. "But by fair means or foul, as I told you before, I shall teach you that you cannot overcome me, and that——"

A step upon the gravel reduces him to silence. The

new-comer is one of the under-servants—a young man, looking now a little sheepish and anxious as he advances to Sir Rupert and makes an awkward bow.

"Please, Sir Rupert, if you could spare me this evening, I want to go home, sir. My mother is ill—at point of death, doctor says."

"Your mother lives—where?"

"At Dorminster, sir. (A big town about fifty miles from Walton Hall.) "If you could give me until the morning, sir, I could go away by late train this evening, and be back by first in the morning."

"Of course you can go," says Sir Rupert, very kindly.

"Thank you, sir," says the man, with a grateful look.

Mark watches his retreating form, and then once more turns to his cousin—to find Sir Rupert has sauntered away to the left, a cigar between his lips, an air of perfect unconcern, of easy contentment, discernible in his whole appearance. How *little* he seems to care! Does he, then, deem his chance so certain? Have all his (Mark's) threats failed to move him? Have they, indeed, been regarded as the empty wind? He walks quickly towards the hills beyond, with a wild view of formulating some scheme that shall be the undoing of this contemptuous cousin of his. For a long, long time, as it seems to him, he walks, but no scheme comes to him.

At half-past seven he returns to the house, ostensibly to dress for dinner; but as that meal is yet quite an hour away, he goes slowly up the stairs, his mind still fixed upon his determination to prevent his cousin from proposing to Miss Hastings to-night at all hazards.

He has begun to despair, however. Time is getting on,

and nothing worthy of thought has presented itself. At the top of the stairs he finds himself opposite his cousin's room, the door of which is open. Looking idly in, he can see that Sir Rupert's man has laid his clothes out on the bed—the clothes in which he will propose to Gwendoline to-night. In spite of his valiant declaration that Rupert is no more to her than any other man, still a sickening conviction that she will say "Yes" to him renders him not only miserable, but reckless. If those clothes were rendered useless—if part of them were to disappear, Rupert could not go to the ball to-night. It would be impossible to order new ones in a hurry, and for a fact he knows that only last week Sir Rupert gave away his second pair of evening trousers to an impecunious tenant, who had been in imminent danger of bringing down the parish authorities upon him on a charge of indecency.

What if the trousers lying there before him were to be given away, too? Not to anybody: merely to silence and solitude and secrecy for a day or so, or a month or so, as the case might be—why, then the day (the night, rather) would be his own. But where to hide them?

He looks quickly round. To take them *from* the room he feels would be dangerous, would be to court discovery. But surely in these big apartments, one leading off the other, some hiding hole may be found?

It is an old-fashioned house, full of strange corners and crannies; and presently Walton's eyes light on a tiny closet, apparently little used, the door of which lies imbedded in one of the walls. There is neither lock nor key to it, and opening it he looks in. All is darkness beyond, except for the light of the room in which he stands, and that only

penetrates into the closet for a yard or so. The latter seems to run backwards a long way. Against the wall of one side of it, a huge age-eaten oak chest stands. Lifting the cover, Mark finds it comparatively empty, though some soft articles lie in it. It will serve. No one in their senses would dream of looking for Sir Rupert's evening things in a mouldy old box like that.

Returning hurriedly to the bedroom, he goes over to the bed and takes up the trousers lying there.

Just at this instant it so happens that two eyes are fixed on him. I have said it is an old house; and at the upper end of this room, leading into an apartment beyond, is a small door with glass at the top of it, sufficiently low to allow a tall man to look through.

Now, George, the under-servant who has gained permission to leave by the eight train, is a tall man. He has come upstairs to do some small service for his master before leaving, and hearing a noise in the next room, and knowing Sir Rupert to be out, has peeped through the high panes to see who is inside. At this moment Mark takes up the trousers, regards them with a vague hesitation for a shorter time than it takes to write this, then deliberately carries them over to the dark closet, enters with them, and almost directly the listening servant hears the sound of the falling lid of a box. Presently Mark comes out again, crosses the room, and disappears into the corridor outside. The whole thing hasn't taken two minutes.

To George the transaction seems inexplicable. A vague notion that he ought to mention it to somebody oppresses him for a moment, then fades. How should he dare to call in question any act of Mr. Walton's, Sir Rupert's own

cousin? No doubt it was by Sir Rupert's desire he had taken those trousers into that closet. Sir Rupert might think him impertinent for watching Mr. Walton; and besides, he now finds himself so late that unless he makes great haste he will miss his train, and not see his mother to-night.

* * * * *

Mark having dressed himself, and hearing Sir Rupert has returned to the house, goes down to the library, where he knows he is likely to find him. On his arm hangs a heavy ulster.

"I sha'n't be here to dinner," says he, somewhat brusquely. "I half promised the Hiltons to dine with them, and go to the ball with them later on. You will excuse me?"

"With pleasure," says Sir Rupert, who has not forgiven him.

The cold answer gives Mark heart. He leaves the library, and jumping into the waiting dog-cart, is driven away to the Hiltons', laughing in a somewhat saturnine fashion at the trick he has played his cousin.

"He has given himself deuced fine airs. We shall see how he pulls through this. At all events, he will not propose to her to-night. (There is not the smallest chance that any one will look *there* for them.) And after the hint he threw out to her, his non-appearance will influence her badly against him. Then *I* shall be there to add to the supposition of his carelessness. In the rebound she may say 'Yes' to me. *There* lies my chance; and her word once given, she is not the one to take it back again."

He drives towards Hilton Park with a rising spirit. Discovery for himself is impossible. It will all be laid to the

charge of some servant's carelessness, if ever those garments *are* found in that old box.



The lights are beginning to burn low in the conservatories. The night is indeed so far advanced that morning treads upon its heels.

"Envious streaks

Do lace the severing clouds in yonder east ;

Night's candles are burnt out."

Or nearly so, at all events. The dowagers are beginning to think of asking for their carriages. The girls, however, still cling fondly to the dance. All save one, perhaps. Miss Hastings, sitting beneath the shade of a huge myrtle in one of the glass houses, is looking pale and fatigued and mirthless. Even the lively sallies of her companion, Mark Walton, fail to raise her to a state of anything even bordering on enjoyment.

"You are tired," says Walton at last, in a tone full of sympathetic tenderness. "Can I do anything for you?"

"Who can minister to a head diseased?" returns she, with a faint smile. "And I confess mine has begun to ache badly. However, don't let us talk of it. Dwelling upon toothache or headache only seems to aggravate the pains of either. Think of something else—your cousin, for example : he is not here to-night."

"No. Isn't it strange? and as a fact I know he meant to come. But that is Rupert exactly; he will be enthusiastic one moment, and the next utterly indifferent. I expect" (with a careless laugh) "he fell asleep after dinner, and forgot all about Lady Daintree and her ball."

"I dare say," says Miss Hastings calmly.

"So like Rupert," goes on Mark, laughing still. "A charming fellow, but perfectly inconsequent. Never in *thorough* earnest about anything, in spite of that little solemn air of his. Perhaps that's where his charm comes in. There is too much of the intense quantity round just now. We grow tired of it. Rupert as a sample of harmless insouciance is positively to be admired."

"Yes?" says Miss Hastings. She seems to grow more tired every moment. "Yet you think he lacks something?"

"Well, yes; a good *deal*, in fact," says Mark, convulsed with inward laughter, as he thinks of his cousin's lack of trousers just at this time. "His understanding, for example, is bare—very bare." He would have given almost anything to be able to say "understandings," but he dares not. However, the joke, old incomplete as it is, is delightful to him. "He doesn't trouble himself to go *into* things." He pauses. The thought that Rupert is now troubled rather because he *can't* go into those things hidden in the box once again brings dangerous laughter near to him.

"You mean he is superficial?"

"Yes, perhaps that is the word" (lightly). "He cannot help taking life easily. He was brought up to that sort of thing, you see. He is so good-natured and so good-looking" (with another kindly laugh), "that he has been rather overpetted by everybody since he came into the world. You can understand all that, can't you? Even *you*" (with the most ingenuous glance and smile at her) "must have felt his charm. He is a special favourite, I do believe, with every girl he knows. *Dear* fellow! one might be tempted to envy him, except that—perhaps—he——"

"He——? What?" asks Miss Hastings, turning a slow but compelling glance at him.

"Well, nothing really, you know' (with a gentle reluctance), "only as it can't be always summer with us, one would prefer to be something more substantial than a mere butterfly."

"Meaning your cousin?" says she.

"Well, yes, dear old fellow. When the storm breaks over his head (and I fear it cannot be long delayed—that old place of his has let him in for considerable money losses this spring) I scarcely know what he will do."

"He is in difficulties?" questions she.

"Well—er—not just at the moment, you know; but it is a mere question of time, I should say. However" (laughing gaily again), "this is no way to amuse you when you feel tired. Let us rather think that Rupert will find a way out of his troubles. Marriage with an heiress, for example, would square him at once. Let us hope he will find one shortly."

"It seems a poor solution," says she, with downcast eyes. Her lips have taken a disdainful curve. She has grown pink, and then white, and pink again, and now at last remains white to the very lips. Has it been *so* with him? Is she only the mere heiress in his eyes? Her heart feels contracted: a wild desire for revenge stirs her breast.

Mark, watching her, knows his moment has come.

"Gwendoline," says he, in a low voice. Miss Hastings starts, very lightly, and looks at him.

"I must speak to you," says Mark hurriedly. "All night long the words have hovered on my lips, yet I dare not utter them. I dare still less to leave you with those words

unsaid. I love you! I *love* you, Gwendoline. Long—*long* before this I would have thrown myself upon your mercy, but somehow I always fancied that there was some one else you—cared for. *If* that be so, in pity tell me so at once."

"There is no one," says the girl, with a proud gesture. *Some one!* If she *had* been mad enough to cherish a—a regard for Sir Rupert, he shall learn now that it was a mere passing fancy of no value, of no strength whatsoever—a mere fancy, as light and fleeting as his own.

"No one?" repeats Mark. "Then, Gwendoline, may I—dare I hope that you——?"

"That I——?" She is looking deliberately at him. There is no nervous anxiety, no bashfulness in her glance. Her face is set, and white, and hard.

"Will you marry me?" exclaims Mark, blurting out the words hurriedly, as if to find others *more* gracious is impossible to him. Her eyes seem to be reading his very brain. "I have told you I love you as no man, I believe, ever loved a woman before. *Say* you will accept that love."

For a while she hesitates. She does not dislike Mark Walton; indeed, it might be said she even likes him; and beyond doubt, in spite of the brusqueness of his wooing, there is sincerity in it. The man is terribly in earnest. And to be sincere, in earnest—to be no mere paltry trifler upon the face of the earth—ah! that is something: that is *much*! As for that other! Well—well—well! Some little thread within her heart seems to give way. It is all over, then, that dream? He had meant nothing—*nothing*. If he *had*, would he have failed to be here with her

to-night?—especially after those words he had whispered to her when he placed her in the carriage in the afternoon?

Once more the hot, angry, offended blood mounts to her brow, as she remembers his look and tone. And she had *believed*; had dwelt upon the promise the veiled words contained all through the evening; had heard them whilst donning her prettiest gown to go and meet him; had lived in a fool's paradise since they had been uttered.

She turns with a sort of angry vehemence to Mark.

"If—if you want me to marry you," says she in a little choked tone, "I——" She breaks down.

"*If?*" exclaims he, seizing her hand. "Am I to understand that you say 'yes' to me, Gwendoline?"

"Yes," says she, in a voice that has fallen into the vaguest whisper.

* * * * *

Sitting in the drawing-room next morning about twelve o'clock, Miss Hastings is startled by hearing the door opened and a visitor announced—Sir Rupert Walton!

She had expected Mark, but not so early (he had returned home with the Hiltons last night—this morning, rather), and *certainly* she had not expected Sir Rupert. Mrs. Hastings is as yet in her room, fatigued by last night's duties, and a feeling of despair mingles with the natural indignation that swells Gwendoline's breast as she rises to receive her visitor.

A reluctant glance at his face, however, disarms half her wrath.

He is looking pale, haggard, miserable. He advances towards her rapidly, though uncertainly, and rather takes her hand than gives his own. His look is imploring. It

is by no means the carelessly gay expression of one who "is never thoroughly in earnest about anything."

Sir Rupert looks terribly in earnest just now.

"I don't know what you have been thinking of me!" exclaims he, in a quick, breathless way, altogether unlike his usual smiling calm. "One would think all the fates had banded together to destroy me. You know I meant to be there last night, Gwendoline. You *know* that."

"You said so," returns she, quite quietly. She has withdrawn her hand.

"Yes; I said it, and—and I hoped you would know what alone I was going for—what I meant to say—what I hoped to hear, and——"

"And after all you didn't come," says she, smiling. "You chose instead to fall asleep by your library fire, even though the gaining of an heiress was in question!" Oh, the scorn in her tone!

"Gwendoline!" He stops short as if she had struck him, and turns very white. "Do you think—do you mean—— If you think that, there is no more to be said." He takes up his hat and makes a movement towards the door; his face has grown cold, haughty.

Seeing the change in it, and the nobility and truthfulness underlying all, her heart misgives her. She feels faint. What if there has been a mistake, after all?

"What *am* I to think?" says she painfully, "except that you either forgot all about me, or else—changed your mind?"

"You are wrong in both thoughts," says he; "I——" (he grows embarrassed); and then, vehemently, "I *must* explain to you. The fact is, when I went to dress myself I

couldn't find part of my evening clothes anywhere. I know you will think it extraordinary that I had nothing to fall back upon, no second suit; but I had given away my others, and was waiting to go to town next week to send a new order to my tailor. It seems absurd to have to explain like this, yet you *must* hear."

"No, no," says the girl, rising to her feet, with a face now as white as his own. "I must not indeed. I" (faintly) "*dare* not. I—last night—your cousin, Mr. Walton—proposed to me, and I——"

"You——!"

He has taken a step forward, and is gazing at her as if defying her to finish her sentence.

"Accepted him!" says she in a tone sharp with misery.

They are still standing facing each other, mute with despair, when Mark Walton is ushered into the room. Something in the strained attitude of both tells him all he wants to know—more indeed, *far* more than he wants to know. To carry things, however, with a high hand—to ignore all emotion—strikes him as the best thing to be done under the circumstances.

"Ah! an early visit, Rupert," says he, addressing his cousin, when he has bowed with a tender sense of possession over Miss Hastings' cold hand. "Well, you have had the pull over me, of course. *You* have had your good night's rest, while I have been turning night into day. By-the-bye, what happened to you last evening? Both Miss Hastings—*Gwendoline*" (with purposeful correction and a beaming smile at his pale fiancée, who does not return it) "and I were wondering what on earth had become of you."

There is no answer. Something in the impressive silence

warns Mark of danger. To declare the situation at once seems to him the one safe plan open to him.

"Have you been telling my cousin of our engagement?" asks he of Gwendoline, with a charming smile.

"Yes," answers she coldly.

Sir Rupert turns upon him a face white with anger.

"You have deliberately stolen a march upon me," says he, "even though I have no doubt you are of more consequence in Miss Hastings' eyes than I am (she has proved that). Still, when you *knew*, when you had elicited from me the fact that I meant to—to——" (his voice sinks, and his eyes fall with a very charming homage before hers) "offer her all I *had* to offer—a heart" (this to her alone), "you might, I think, have had enough honourable feeling in you to put off your proposal for a few hours."

"He *knew*?" asks Miss Hastings, beneath her breath.

"Yes, I knew," says Mark boldly. "I knew, too, the instability of your character. I waited. Miss Hastings will herself tell you I did not propose to her until half the guests had left; after *that* I felt you had forgotten all about your promise to meet her."

"You felt nothing of the sort," says Rupert decidedly. He might add more, but that one of the servants coming into the room checks him. The man advances to Sir Rupert—a telegram on a salver.

"One of your servants brought it, sir, and he is waiting," he says.

Further explanation is unnecessary. The rather foolish head of George appears in the doorway, and the voice of George comes right up the room.

"If you please, Sir Rupert, hearin' as 'ow you was put out about them breeks o' yourn, a' thought as I'd come an' tell ye 'bout 'em. But I'm late, sir, it seems : Mr. Walton there will be for tellin' you everythin'."

"Who?—I?" says Mark—paling, however.

"I think perhaps if I were to speak to him outside——" says Sir Rupert to Gwendoline.

"No; let him speak here," says she, with decision. Womanlike, she has jumped to a conclusion, and to do her no injustice she has not jumped far wrong.

"Go on, George," says Sir Rupert calmly. "You know about these missing garments of mine, then?"

"Why, yes, sir. But I'm no good to speak" (bashfully). "If" glancing directly at Mark, "Mr. Walton would explain now——"

"What the devil have I got to do with it?" says Mark violently.

"Why, sir, only this—I saw you put 'em into the closet of Sir Rupert's room——"

"Oh! this is monstrous!" says Mark, livid. "Does the fellow suggest that I am a somnambulist—that I walk in my sleep—that I——"

"He has suggested nothing that I am aware of," interrupts his cousin, regarding him curiously. "You can examine him yourself."

"I decline. I refuse to do anything of the sort," replies Mark furiously. "Order him from the room, that is *your* business."

"Please, Sir Rupert," says the man, very respectfully, "I'll go, if so be as you wish it; but——"

"No, stay," says Miss Hastings quickly. "The sooner

this affair is cleared up the better. Sir Rupert, ask him what he means about that closet."

"Why, this, miss," says the man. "I 'appened to be in the next room, the one off Sir Rupert's, when I heard a step, an' knowin' the master to be out, I just looked through the top glass of the door leadin' into the room I was in, an' I see Mr. Walton there"—with a not too friendly glance at Mark now—"takin' up Sir Rupert's evenin' breeches, axin' yer parding, miss, and carryin' of 'em off to the closet. I heerd, too, the closin' of the big oak trunk inside of that closet; an' when I come home an' Gregory, the butler, miss, told me of the awful mull there was last night through Sir Rupert's not bein' able to dress himself an' go to that ball, I remembered me about all I'd seen through them panes, an' I told him about Mr. Walton takin' the trousers, an'——"

"You lie, fellow!" cries Mark, quivering with rage. "Rupert—Miss Hastings, will you stand by, and——"

"Did Gregory find the trousers in that box?" asks Sir Rupert of the astonished George.

"Why, yes, sir. I'm sorry if——"

"That will do. Go!" says Sir Rupert; and the man obeys him.

There is silence for a moment, then :

"Was *that* what you meant when you said you would use foul means or fair to prevent me from proposing to Miss Hastings?" asks Sir Rupert, with such concentrated scorn in his cold voice as makes his cousin quail. "*That* was foul indeed!"

"Gwendoline, you at least will believe in me. I have your word that you will marry me. You will not prove

false to that ! You will not give ear to these vile calumnies ! ”

Falsity itself rings through the violent asseverance of his tone.

“What of the calumnies you uttered last night ? ” says she, trembling, but full of courage. “Knowing what you did, how did you dare describe your cousin to me as calmly sleeping by the fire, forgetful of all things, when——”

“You refuse me a hearing, then ? You, *too*, believe me guilty of this thing,” says Mark, rising, his voice hoarse, his eyes malignant.

“I believe Sir Rupert would have been at Lady Daintree’s last night had it not been made impossible to him.”

“Ah ! ah ! ” cries Mark wildly, losing now all control over himself. “You would believe *anything* because you are infatuated about him. You are as vulgarly in love with him as any Phyllis with her Corydon.”

“Silence, sir ! ” cries Sir Rupert.

“I will *not* be silent ” (furiously). “And as the end has come, learn, then, that I *did* do my best to prevent your appearance at that ball last night. That fellow’s story—curse him !—was all true ! But you ” (turning to Gwendoline, who has shrunk back and would fall except for Sir Rupert’s protecting arm)—“you will rue this day. If you think he can love you as I do, you make a mistake. Marry him—marry him—and repent at leisure ! The more leisure for repentance, the more I shall be pleased.”

He walks out of the room.

Sir Rupert still holds Gwendoline close to his heart. Indeed, she had been on the point of fainting.

“Oh, is he gone ? ” says she, bursting into tears.

"Yes; for ever, I hope, so far as we are concerned. And now, Gwendoline, I will risk no further chances. Tell me, *tell* me that I may hope."

"Oh, you know it!" says she, sobbing, with her face against his breast. "Only how can you bear to look at me again, after all I said to you?"

"There is only one thing I can remember," says he, holding her close to him. "It was that—about your being an heiress." He draws his breath quickly, in a hurt sort of way.

"Ah! He said that amongst other dreadful accusations," cries she. "I can't recall the others: they don't seem to matter now. But *that* cut me to the heart. You will not forgive it, Rupert, *ever*. I know you won't. You" (tightening her arms about him and holding him with all her might)—"you had better go away at once and forget me."

"That's easier said than done," says Sir Rupert, laughing, though rather unsteadily. "If I went to the ends of the world, do you think I should forget you? No!"

"Are you *sure*?" whispers she.

"Quite sure. And you, Gwendoline? You love me? You will marry me?"

"Some day"—softly.

"That sounds terribly far off. I may tell my mother we are engaged, however?"

"Oh no, not *yet*. I should be ashamed. Just think" (nervously): "to-day to be engaged to your cousin—to-morrow to you; it sounds so *horrid*."

"It is even worse than that," says he, laughing: "I am afraid it has all occurred in *one* day! Never mind, if you

like to wait a week or so, why, we shall have our secret all to ourselves, and that will make it even sweeter. But it mustn't be *more* than a week's secrecy, darling, because autumn is the nicest time for going abroad. *Early* autumn. You like Switzerland in September, don't you ? "

" Yes, very much," replies Miss Hastings meekly, and with a soft blush.

TWO TO A QUARREL.

IT had been an ideal marriage! Everybody had been delighted with it; and occurring as it did just at the close of last season, had been considered a very fitting wind-up to it. Both the principal actors in the fashionable drama had hosts of friends, and the general rejoicings over the happy event had been, therefore, not only loud, but deep. Lady Flora Travers was an orphan, young, lovely, lively—a little *too* lively, perhaps—and an heiress into the bargain, on quite a grand scale. Sir Frederic Blount was an orphan too, young, handsome, and quite abominably rich for a man whose heart had gone out to an heiress; and there hadn't been the slightest doubt about the *amount* of heart thrown into the affair: two people so utterly and entirely in love had seldom (every one agreed) been seen. It was the most deliciously romantic thing all through. Society was charmed. There wasn't a flaw in the little piece anywhere. It ran with a beatific smoothness; and Sir Frederic was so charming. Just a *soupçon* of temper, perhaps; but after all, what then—one must have *something*.

Belgravia was indeed in raptures! Unaccustomed to see the saucy little god Love striding victoriously amongst its

crowds, it at once opened its arms to him and gave him quite an ovation. They blessed Sir Frederic and Lady Flora for the fresh sensation they had given it. It was absolutely unique all through, a perfect innovation. There had been sad cases of young people, who, wickedly desirous of marking out a path for themselves, had entered on it, crying aloud that silly old line, "All for love and the world well lost," as a sort of defiance ; but they had been very justly thrust out of sight and speedily forgotten. But *here* was a triumph : love and common sense hand in hand. An ideal marriage *indeed* ! With nothing in it to provoke the wrath of guardians, or throw cold water on the warm congratulations of friends, or prevent the giving way to sentimental remarks on the beauty of love unadulterated—love pure and simple, and untouched by mercenary motives. It was as though a touch of Arcadia had fallen into Vanity Fair, and brightened all things by its freshness.

The sun had shone gaily on the marriage morning. What else *could* it do ? cried the enthusiasts. The bride smiled through her tears, the bridegroom was the very personification of hope fulfilled. It was the prettiest pageant possible. As the happy pair drove away beneath a shower of rice, everybody told everybody else that for once in a way one might be sure that years of unbroken joy lay before them.

And everybody was wrong !

Scarcely three months had elapsed when society was electrified by the news that Sir Frederic and Lady Blount had separated, "by mutual consent." Incompatibility of temper, said some ; jealousy on both sides, said others ; and neither was far wide of the mark.

Sir Frederic, it must be confessed, had been somewhat

wild in the earlier years of his life. He had sown several crops of the most unprofitable oats. His amusements had hardly been *sans reproche*, and some kind friends had hinted as much to the young bride. Since his marriage, since his engagement indeed, he had run perfectly straight; but *this* the kind friends had forgotten to hint. She grew first horrified, then disgusted, then a little reckless. She was so young that the very suspicion of the evil that the world holds locked in its tired bosom was unknown to her. She began with a determination not to *care*—to be revenged. This resulted in his accusing her of a flirtation with a man whom secretly she abhorred. It was an opening, and she seized upon it, letting loose on him all the floodgates of wrath and wounded pride and miserable disappointment that had been consuming her. Recriminations grew furious. What had been called liveliness of disposition grew into decided temper, and before any honest friends could interfere, the devoted bride and bridegroom of three months ago had parted with the sworn determination on both sides *never* to see each other again.

The charming home in Gloucestershire—The Firs—was broken up. Sir Frederic went one way, Lady Flora another. When cross-examined by tearful relatives they both raged and stormed, and grew so vague and excitable that in the end no one could quite understand how such a terrible situation could have arisen out of what was seemingly a trivial affair.

"It is the most absurd case I ever heard of," says Mrs. Wylde to Lady Maria Walton, with a shrug of her dainty shoulders. Both are friends of the Blounts, but Lady Maria is something more. She is a first cousin of Sir Frederic's

on his mother's side, and a thirty-first cousin of Lady Flora's on her father's side. As men always carry the day, her sympathies more or less are for Sir Frederic, though she is an open admirer of Lady Flora's, who, indeed, can be specially charming when she likes.

Lady Maria is a tall, able-bodied woman, with no nonsense about her (unless we except her kindly heart), and a strength of mind that renders her the terror of her acquaintances. With her a spade is indeed a spade, and she calls it so; but that she is a thoroughly honest-hearted and good-natured woman *au fond*, nobody would dream of disputing.

"Absurd to a fault," says she now, a good deal of annoyance in her tone.

"What can they both be thinking of? A more wanton throwing away of happiness is unknown."

"Well, you see, she thinks one thing; he another."

"Of course we all knew they had *tempers*. But that they should come to such loggerheads, and all for nothing! She can't *really* believe that story."

"She says she does. She persists in believing. No harm talking about it," says Lady Maria, rather savagely, "as all the world seems up in the ridiculous tale."

"Yes, *such* a bore!"

"We are quite aware that Frederic had—er—you know—well, his thoughtless moments when a bachelor—and—er——"

"I know; they all do," says Mrs. Wylde with feeling, and a gentle flourish of her hands.

"Quite so" (sympathetically). "Well, you know the story, don't you? Frederic had to go up to town very

frequently after his marriage, *strictly* on business about that Alderley estate (though nothing can convince her of that *now*), and then he met Captain Stannard—you've met him——"

"Oh yes! Horrid man!"

"Well, he induced him to run down with him to Richmond to one of those abominable little dinners—you know."

"I know" (with increasing feeling).

"And there was an actress there. Most *respectable* young woman, I've learned since, though it's of no use to learn anything nowadays—people believe just what they like. But at all events, Drewry was her name, and Flora heard of it—the dinner (when he was supposed to be at his lawyer's), the name of the actress, *everything*."

"But how?"

"Why, through Mrs. Fane, of course. You *know* Violet: always troublesome. Felt it her duty, she said, to warn poor dear Flora of the way her husband was going on, and so destroyed the happiness of two nice young people. Really, I haven't patience with her!"

"No bigger flirt in town than Violet," says Mrs. Wylde, with disgust. "Tried her hand on Sir Frederic, I know for a fact; and, finding herself thoroughly out of it, determined, I conclude, to be revenged on him. Paltry, I call it!"

"Well, she has won her case," says Lady Maria, with a sigh. "She told poor Flora not only that, but a good deal more. She poisoned her mind in many ways, mentioning things about Frederic's bachelor life that should not have been told to a young creature like Flora."

"She was always a dangerous person, in spite of, or rather because of, her seraphic countenance. She looks like an angel, and feels like a——"

"No, no; *come*, now, my dear girl," interrupts Lady Maria hastily, who is very downright about earthly matters, but rather shrinks from tackling those of the other world. "No good in swearing. The end is before us. No use in quarrelling with fate. Flora cut up very rough at first, drove Frederic away from her——"

"And is now apparently quite happy. I saw her at the Despard's last week, and she was the life of the party."

"She is *not* happy, for all that. She is only wearing herself out in a mad endeavour to appear so."

"I dare say; and all for nothing. For one thing, it is a pity that nobody can undeceive her about that actress. I'm sure Sir Frederic never went to Richmond to meet her or any other woman."

"He went simply because time hung heavily on his hands and he couldn't go home because he had an appointment at his lawyer's for eleven o'clock the next morning. But Flora believes the worst. She goes about now calling him 'that man'—such bad taste! But she was too young a girl to be married to a young man, with her ideas of independence and her temper."

"Sir Frederic has a temper, too."

"True, true; yet to me they seemed matched by Heaven itself, and I am thoroughly downhearted about the whole affair. What's that?" (starting).

"A knock at the door. Fresh visitors."

"Flora's knock, surely."

"Is it? Well, I'm off," says Mrs. Wylde, rising. "She

will have a dozen things to say to you, and I should be in the way. *Good-bye.*"

A minute or two afterwards the door reopens to admit a very lovely vision. *Such* a pretty young woman! A small, slight, lovely creature, with big grey eyes and masses of nut-brown hair. Her nose is a little, a very little, *retroussé*, and her mouth, if sweet when the owner of it is pleased, is distinctly suggestive of mutiny when the owner may be out of temper.

"Oh, Maria!" cries she, precipitating herself into Lady Maria's arms, "what a blessing to find you by yourself! I've such a lot of things to say to you!"

"Have you, dear? Then sit down here, near me. About" (with prophetic instinct that is hardly of the first order) "Sir Frederic?"

"About him! Not likely!" (with great show of indignation).

"About what, then?" says Lady Maria, with seeming curiosity. Lady Maria knows her. It is surely Sir Frederic or *nothing* that has brought her. "Take off your furs, and pull your chair up to the fire. Now, then, for your news."

"Oh, well, I must warm myself first" (temporising). "There is so much, you see, to tell, that I—— By-the-bye, as you mentioned *that man*, you may as well tell me if you have seen him lately."

"Quite lately. Yesterday, in fact."

"Ah." Eloquent silence. "How is he looking?"

"Pretty well. Pale, perhaps, if anything. A little dejected: I can't suppose he is happy."

"Can't you?" (scornfully). "*I* can. He has obtained his beloved liberty again: *that* counts with a man."

"With some men, perhaps. You are looking pale too, dear" (ignoring her outburst). "A little rest would be good for you. Why not come down to the country with me for Christmas? So quiet. Not a soul! I sha'n't ask any one to the Beeches this year."

"I should like it, but—you are so close to my—*his* house—that—I should hate to go."

"You needn't be afraid of meeting *him* there. He is going abroad almost directly."

"Eh?" (starting violently).

"Yes, abroad."

"But where?"

"Italy."

"Italy! Why Italy? What on earth is taking him to Italy?" She rises abruptly, and walks over to the window as though repose is impossible to her. "Who is going with him?" asks she at last, in quite a dreadful tone.

"I haven't asked him," returns Lady Maria coldly.

"You showed your sense. It is *that woman*, of course!"

"What woman?" (icily).

"Oh, you know!" That actress, Drewry."

"Really, Flora," says Lady Maria, with very righteous anger, "I must request you will not talk to me like this."

"Why not? You aren't dead to the world, I suppose. You aren't deaf, dumb, or blind. You are a reasonable person; you must see for yourself how things go."

"I may not be blind; but you are, and most wilfully so. That woman, as you call her, is a most respectable person, and is about to be married to a solicitor in very good practice. I have made minute inquiries, and I firmly believe that Frederic knows as much about her as he does

of the solar system, and you know how ignorant he is about that ! Professor——”

“Not a bit more ignorant than any one else,” interrupts Lady Flora tartly.

“That’s what you think, my dear. Nonsense, Flora : I have questioned him about Miss Drewry, and he doesn’t so much as admire her. He told me she had high shoulders, and a mouth from ear to ear.”

“And you were taken in by *that* ! Why, that’s the oldest trick of all. When men fall in love where they ought not, they always describe the woman to their friends as ‘not much to look at, you know,’ or something like that. Really, Maria, with your experience you ought to know something !”

This allusion to her age very naturally incenses Lady Maria.

“And you, with your experience, of course know *everything*,” says she, with withering contempt. “My good child, if I were you, I——”

“What’s that ?” says Lady Flora suddenly, half rising from her chair and glancing nervously at the door. The sound of a loud knock at the hall door is clanging through the house. “Maria ! His knock !”

“Well, what of it ? Why not stay and see him, Flora ? I am sure if you both met, you——”

“Met ! Do you think I should stay for one moment in the room with that man ! No ! I shall go in here” (moving towards a door at the end of the room that leads to a smaller apartment beyond) “until he chooses to bring his visit to an end. I have still a good deal to say to you.”

She has hardly had time to gain her city of refuge when the servant ushers into the drawing-room Sir Frederic Blount.

"Thought I heard voices," says he suspiciously, when he has greeted Lady Maria.

"Well, so you did," says she, a little impatiently, not being in the best of tempers.

"Ah! Lady Blount?"

"Yes."

"H'm. In there now?" (pointing to opposite door).

"I dare say." A pause.

"How is she looking?" demands Sir Frederic, after a perceptible struggle with his dignity.

"Very lovely indeed; but pale, I think. Why on earth, Frederic, don't you try to make it up with her?"

"With her! You must be mad, Maria! What! when she wilfully sought a quarrel with me, and openly insulted me! Look here: I loved her as my own soul, and she deliberately separated herself from me."

"Yet I think she is very unhappy."

"A woman without a heart is never unhappy."

"Really, Frederic, I do think you are rather unjust. She——"

"I'm done with her. Don't let us discuss her any further. She can go her way. I can go mine for the future."

"I don't see where *she* is to go, at all events. A woman in her equivocal position is always in the wrong."

"It is her own doing. She evidently found life dull with me, and very cleverly sought and found a road out of her difficulty."

"Still, you must care about her welfare."

"I don't" (doggedly).

"I give you credit for better feeling than that ; so I will tell you that she is coming down with me to Gloucestershire for Christmas. She will be therefore within a mile or two of her—*your*—home."

"A hint to me keep away" (with a bitter laugh). "Don't be frightened ! I am going abroad, as you know."

"I am sorry about that. I had hoped——"

"Hope nothing where we two are concerned : all is over and done with." He pauses, looks out of the window, and then comes back to Lady Maria. "She—she has plenty of money, at all events?" says he, with a frown that is meant to prevent anybody from thinking that his question contains any gentle concern for her.

"Plenty, I should say."

"You blame me, Maria," says the young man suddenly. "You think I should give in and explain, and condone the fact that she has maligned me most cruelly ; but that is not all. She flirted most disgracefully with a hideous little brute of a hussar last time we were at a ball together, and——"

"I know all about that. She says it was only because she was so disgusted with your behaviour," cries Lady Maria. "You are a pair of babies ; you ought to be taken in hand by some firm person, and *compelled* to behave yourselves."

"Oh ! she says that, does she ?" (wrathfully). "Well, I don't care what she says. Anyhow, I sha'n't keep her in durance vile any longer" (taking up his hat). "Some other day I may be fortunate enough to find you at home without her."

Lady Maria, rather relieved, bids him a kindly adieu, and goes instantly to the room that has harboured the fugitive. But where *is* she? And what is this awfully cold cutting air that salutes her as she enters the apartment? What *do* the servants mean by opening the windows at this time of the year—and—— Good heavens! are those Flora's feet?"

It is all that can be seen of Flora at present, at all events. She has thrown up the sash of the window to its highest extent, and has thrown her body out of the window with an amount of generosity that threatens to develop itself into unconscious suicide.

Lady Maria, catching sight of her and her remarkable attitude, gives way to wild but secret mirth. All this to catch one fleeting glance at the back of his head!

"Flora! Flora!" cries she. "What on earth are you doing there?"

Her voice is shrill, and Flora, hearing it, scrambles back to her feet with crimson cheeks and a manner openly confused.

"My dear, if you had run downstairs to the library you could have seen him quite easily and without all this danger," says Lady Maria, rather maliciously. "The slightest tip would have sent you into the area. How foolish! If I had known you so much wanted to catch a glimpse, I might have arranged something: I——"

"Nonsense! it was mere curiosity, nothing more," says Lady Flora, with a stamp of her little foot. "How horrid you can be, Maria! Well" (impetuously), "what did he say? Abusing me as usual, I suppose?"

"He didn't spare you, certainly; but he was just, I think."

"Thank you" (angrily). "He was not only *just*, as you call it, but evidently in the highest spirits. I could hear his voice here—*hateful* voice. Well—er—and how is he looking *now*?"

Lady Maria gives way to sardonic mirth.

"Well?" says Lady Flora, regarding her with distinct disfavour. "What have I said to make you laugh?"

"Not much. Only—that is just the first question he asked me about *you*."

"How *rude* of him!" (flushing angrily). "And you? I *hope* you said I was never looking better."

"Yes. I said you were in robust health, and didn't seem to care a bit about anything connected with *him*, at all events."

"Oh, *did* you?" (with a perceptible fall of the lovely face and an accent replete with disappointment).

"That was right, wasn't it?" says Lady Maria blandly.

"*Quite* right. *Fancy* his wanting to know how I looked! For what, I wonder?"

"Mere idle curiosity, my dear, of course—the same feeling that made you nearly throw yourself out of the window just now simply to catch a fleeting vision of the back of his detested head."

"If you think it was anything *else*!" (hotly).

"I don't, my dear girl: how could I?"

"And—is it true he is going abroad?"

"Quite true. He starts next week, I fancy; so you are safe, if you come to Gloucestershire with me for Christmas. In fact, I made it safe for you. I told him you were to be with me at that time."

"And he?"

"Said that alone would be sufficient to keep him out of the county."

"He said *that!*" She has risen to her feet, and is looking very pale. She recovers herself, however, almost immediately. "I'm glad he has *some* sense of decency," says she haughtily.

* * * * *

It is some weeks later, and Christmas Day. Quite a correct Christmas Day, with snowflakes flying and evergreens so white as to belie their name, and icicles drooping from the bridge that spans the river which flows through Lady Maria's pretty domain.

Both she and Lady Flora have been to church in the morning, and have enjoyed a good lunch afterwards, and are now dozing with a pretence of reading before a fire that might have roasted an ox in the good old days when roasted oxen were. Lady Maria has, indeed, so far given in to the blandishments of Somnus that a gentle snore awakens the air around her, and Lady Flora, roused by it, starts into a more upright position, and a sudden knowledge that a manly footstep is rapidly approaching the small and cosy room in which they are sitting.

"Good heavens, Maria! Wake! wake! some one is coming. Oh! you *told* me he had gone to Italy, and now——"

"Well, so he has," says Lady Maria, rubbing her eyes.

"He hasn't. He is here. He is coming up the stairs. Oh!" (springing to her feet, and looking distractedly around her), "*where* shall I go?"

"He is coming, sure enough," says Lady Maria, now

wide awake. "Bless me, what liars men are! And he declared to me that——"

"Never mind *anything*. Think of me," cries Lady Flora, literally wringing her hands in front of her hostess. "I *can't* go out at the door, or I'll meet him face to face. Oh! *why* do they build rooms with only one mode of egress in them? If there had been another door, I might—— I'm *undone*, Maria. But no" (with a swift and happy thought)—— "that screen. Behind that I shall be secure—safe. And don't keep him long—and——"

"But, my dear," gasps poor Lady Maria wildly, "he will probably say all sorts of things, and you will be listening, and—— Good gracious, it isn't fair. It will be dreadful."

"I shall put my fingers in my ears. Betray me at your peril!" cries Lady Flora, in a dramatic whisper. The tail of her gown just disappears behind the tall Japanese screen as Sir Frederic Blount is announced.

And now begins a purgatory for poor Lady Maria.

"Thought—er—that as I had to drop down to this part of the world I'd like to come and see you," says Sir Frederic, with manifest hypocrisy and a series of furtive glances all round the room as though in search of something. "Thought, too, that I—er—heard voices as I came up the stairs."

"And *I* thought you were safe in Italy," says Lady Maria, who is very justly exasperated by his appearance at this moment.

"Had to put it off for a week or so. Business down here with my steward. Beastly nuisance, but had to come."

Awkward silence. Lady Maria, with her eyes fixed on

the Japanese screen, is giving herself up a prey to despair. As for her putting her fingers in her ears, she doesn't believe a word of it.

"Lady Flora with you?" asks Sir Frederic at last, jerking out the question awkwardly.

"Yes."

"Gone out for a walk?"

"No, no. In retirement," says the wretched Lady Maria, with a groan that she adroitly turns into a sneeze.

"Ah! headache?"

"Really, Frederic, considering the terms you and Lady Flora are on, I think it a little—well—a little *odd* of you, to say the least of it, to cross-examine me about her like this; such anxiety about her health on your part is hardly to be expected."

"*Anxiety?* on my part? I can't imagine what you mean by that," exclaims Sir Frederic indignantly. He rises, and going over to the Indian hearthrug, leans against the mantelpiece and glowers from that lofty position down upon Lady Maria. The edge of the Japanese screen touches the hearthrug, and a slight leaning back of Sir Frederic would in all probability reveal to him the person hiding behind it. Lady Maria becomes conscious of a sensation of faintness.

"Don't stand there; so very bad for your complexion," stammers she inconsequently.

As Sir Frederic is standing manlike with his back to the fire, the suggestion about his complexion falls flat.

"I'm chilly," says he absently; and then, "Anxious about *her*—the woman who wilfully deserted me; who——"

"Once for all, Frederic, I decline to discuss your wife," says Lady Maria frantically. "Talk of taxation, servants,

the education of the lower classes, any abominable subject you like, but *not* of Flora."

"I can't help it," says Sir Frederic, with an obstinate shake of his head. "You began it. You suggested I should or did feel anxiety for—Fl—Lady Flora, and I insist upon showing you why——"

"I quite understand, I assure you."

"You don't. You *can't*, or you wouldn't have spoken as you did. A man more barbarously treated than I have been has seldom——"

Here, seeing the screen shake ominously, Lady Maria loses her head.

"Of course, of course. We *all* know that," cries she enthusiastically—*fatally*. The screen now seems to be the receptacle of an earthquake in an extremely advanced stage. Oh! those young women and their promises about their fingers and their ears. "I'm not well, Frederic: I'm tired; I've toothache, neuralgia, sciatica, lumbago, tic-douloureux, *everything*!" almost screams Lady Maria. "I wish you would go away."

"You look all right," says Sir Frederic, gazing at her with a sceptical eye. "What you really mean is, that you don't want to hear my exculpation. I don't blame you. *She* has been priming you with abuse of me, of *course*; but I insist on setting myself right with you. You think Flora in the right, but she is not: it is *I* who am in the right" (striking his clenched fist against his breast in quite an alarming fashion).

The—"Yes, to be sure," that hangs on Lady Maria's agitated lips is checked in the bud by another evolution of the incipient earthquake. Good heavens! How long is

this to last? And when the end comes, how many survivors will there be?

"Look here," says Sir Frederic violently: "once or all, you shall learn the truth. She married me not knowing her own mind (which, apparently, is of a poor sort), and, tiring of me, sought occasion to regain her liberty. She *never* believed that story about me, but it served as a pretext for her plan. She deliberately broke off all relations with me simply to suit herself, and with a full belief in her inmost soul that I was innocent of the ridiculous charge she brought against me. She——"

The screen goes over with a crash: a beautiful but furious young woman appears, standing in its place. It is a perfect transformation scene. Lady Maria falls back in her chair half fainting; Sir Frederic, stepping back in wild astonishment, puts his foot on Lady Maria's tabby, who doesn't faint at all, but sets up such a mee-owing as makes the welkin ring. All is confusion.

The cat is the first to recover; then the outraged goddess, who, advancing on her husband, regards him with a glittering eye.

"How *dare* you say that?" says she, in a low but terror-striking tone. And now she turns to the hapless Lady Maria. "You listened to him! you applauded him! you took his part! you said that I had treated him barbarously! Oh, *Maria*!"

Lady Maria makes an effort to explain, but speech is beyond her. She is chilled by Sir Frederic's eye, who now advances straight down upon her.

"And you *knew* she was there all the time—*listening*" with a scornful glance at Flora, who returns it fourfold).

"You let me say what was in my mind, without even seeking to check me: you——"

But this is too much for Lady Maria; such flagrant injustice restores to her her dignity. She rises to the occasion and her feet.

"Once for all," says she sternly, "I am done with you; yes, with *both* of you. You are ungrateful—worthless—*heartless*! Hitherto I have done what I could for you. For the future you shall manage your own affairs without assistance from me. You can make use of this room—of this house—of anything belonging to me, but of *me—never again!*"

She sails with much dignity from the room.

"There!" says Sir Frederic, turning round to his wife: "you have done it, as usual."

"Done what? I've done nothing. It is *you* who have done everything! And not satisfied with having insulted me, you come here and abuse me to Maria behind my back."

"I spoke only the truth. And you—was it fair to hide behind a screen and listen to what wasn't intended for you? There's an ugly name for *that*, you know" (hotly).

"I don't care what ugly names you call me. Your opinion of me has ceased to be of any importance. And I *wasn't* listening! I kept my fingers tight in my ears until you had been here for *hours*; then my arms tired, and I——"

"Hours! I like that" (with a sardonic laugh); "I haven't been here for twenty minutes yet."

"Oh, *you* could say anything," says Lady Blount; and brushing contemptuously past him, she sinks into a lounging

chair and takes up a magazine with an air of indifference that *ought* to have imposed upon any one. But Sir Frederic, being her husband, can read between the lines. Husbands are always difficult.

‘Well, not a word of refutation?’ says he mockingly. ‘You acknowledge, then, I spoke only the bare truth when I said that you sought occasion to get rid of me because you were tired of me?’

‘To refute that I must be rude; I must say you are lying,’ says Lady Flora deliberately. ‘But that, after all, is scarcely a rudeness, as you know it without my telling.’

‘I know nothing of the sort. If there is a lie anywhere, it belongs to the person who told you I had anything whatsoever to do with Miss Drewry.’

‘I *forbid* you to mention that woman’ (starting to her feet and staring angrily at him).

‘I see no reason why I shouldn’t.’

‘And all those frequent journeys to town a month after we were married: was there no reason for them, either?’

‘Plenty of reason. Business took me to town on every occasion.’

‘Why can’t you think of something *new*?’ says she scornfully. ‘Business! Was there *ever* a case of this sort when business wasn’t the excuse for it?’

‘I wonder who is your monitress!’ says he, with a short and most unmirthful laugh; ‘she ought to be proud of herself, at all events. She has taught you a good deal of very unwearable stuff.’

‘I won’t be sneered at by you,’ says she, with a stamp of her pretty foot. ‘I came here hoping to avoid you;

and——” she pauses ; then, suddenly : “ What brought you here to-day ? ”

“ To see you ! ” returns he doggedly.

He is hardly prepared for the result of this speech. Lady Flora, after a moment's struggle, bursts into tears.

“ Flora ! ” cries he, making a movement towards her.

“ Don't attempt to call me by my name,” sobs she passionately. “ And don't think I am crying because of *you*. No, it is my self-esteem that is hurt : I cannot forget that I once——” (she breaks down completely).

“ *Did* you once love me ? ” says he sadly. “ Then what is all this about ? Flora, listen to me. Before my marriage I may have been what people call wild. There was too much gambling, too much champagne, too much—of many things better avoided. But from the day of our engagement, nay, from the day we first met, I had neither thoughts nor glances for any one but you. On my soul I swear it. What can I say more ? ”

“ Oh ! it is too late,” says she, with a little despairing gesture. “ There are so many things not to be forgotten.”

“ Quite true ! ” returns he, with spirit : “ there *are* many things ; but as to their being never forgotten—*well* ! There was your flirtation with that fellow in the Hussars——”

“ Captain Pierrepont. Nonsense ! I defy you to think I meant anything by that. A hideous, foolish, pale-eyed creature ! *No* ; when I mean that sort of thing, I shall choose somebody good-looking.”

“ Oh, will you indeed ! ” says he stiffly. And then the absurdity of it strikes on them, and they both burst into a short and rather uncomfortable laugh. Still, it airs the atmosphere.

"It is getting late : you are going?" says she presently, with much inhospitality.

"Not at all. I hope Lady Maria, in spite of al that has come and gone, will give me my dinner."

"But *I* am staying here."

"Well?"

"I suppose you mean me to have no dinner."

"On the contrary, I hope you will dine with me. Considering what I have endured already from you, I believe you will be a very desirable addition to the feast—a veritable *sauce piquante*."

"Well, I sha'n't dine with you."

"Why not, Flora?" says he suddenly. "Is it all so irremediable? *Think!* We *were* happy once, and—— Oh! darling, you are crying again. Make it up with me, Flora, and we'll let the past go by us."

"Oh, but if it is true that you—that I—that it was all an untruth about that woman, you will never forgive me," says she, pressing back from her his eager hands.

"Try me. What is there I *wouldn't* forgive you? But, oh! Flora, how could you have thought it?"

"I didn't want to think it, but——" She gives way suddenly and flings her arms round his neck. "Freddy! Freddy! how good it is to be able to kiss you again!"

After this matters go very easily.

"But now you won't be able to go abroad," says she presently.

"Why not?"

"And leave me?" (half starting out of his arms).

"Certainly not. We'll go together. I'll explain to the

men I was going with, and make it straight with them, and then you and I will have a second honeymoon."

"Yes: we'll begin our life all over again."

Here she begins to cry a little, and to clasp him closer.

"What is it, darling?"

"Nothing. Only every night since we parted I have prayed that I might die soon, and now I'm afraid that my prayer will be answered."

"Well, I've been praying that we might come together again, and spend a long life together; and my prayer is as good as yours any day, and much more sensible, so of course it will gain the day," says he; and if this is a pious lie on his part, I've no doubt it will be forgiven him.

"It *ought* to," says she hopefully. Then—"Freddy! it is Christmas Day. A lucky day to make it up, isn't it?"

"A lucky day for me, certainly."

"And for me, too. But Maria" (nervously). "I don't see how we are to face her again."

At this moment the door opens, and Lady Maria, who has not been able to restrain her curiosity any longer, appears on the threshold.

The fact that the two before her start guiltily asunder on her abrupt entrance explains everything.

"Well, I *am* glad!" cries she, her whole face melting into one beaming smile.

A WRONG TURNING.

“**D**EAR fellow ! so glad to see you ! But what a godless hour to arrive at ! After twelve ! You must be frozen,” cries Oswald Travers all in one breath, as he rushes down the stone steps to welcome his cousin. “Here, Higgins ” (to the butler), “see to Captain Dugdale’s luggage. By Jove ! what a night !”

“Couldn’t come a second sooner,” says Dugdale, springing from the dog-cart and shaking the snow from his shoulders. “Thought up to the last I shouldn’t be able to come at all. As it is I’ve run it rather fine—eh ? This is the 23rd, and——”

“The 24th, my good friend ; Christmas Eve already. Here, come along ; you must be positively famished.”

“Well, I *could* eat something,” says Dugdale, laughing, and following him into the grand old hall, still ablaze with lights, and with two roaring fires in it that seem determined to defy the wintry cold without.

“Sir George and the *mater*, and all the respectable members of the household, are in bed,” says Oswald, the eldest son of the name. “The more frivolous ones are still in the billiard-room. But we can give them a wide berth

for this night, at all events, as I expect you are tired ; and, besides, I want a word or two with you alone. My father had quite given you up—you are so late. Come along, and let me show you your room whilst they are preparing some supper for you. Higgins, which is Captain Dugdale's room ?”

“ Blue chamber, sir ; east wing.”

“ All right. I say, old man,” says Oswald apologetically, stopping midway upstairs to look back at his cousin, “ I hope you won't mind, but you know what Sir George is at Christmas-time. He will ask *everybody* all at once ; and this time he has so outdone himself that we have been obliged to double-bed some of the larger rooms. They've put one of the young Ormsbys into yours—a quiet lad, nineteen or so, steady, respectable, warranted not to bite, but rather a bore for you, nevertheless, I'm afraid.”

“ Warranted not to snore would be more to the purpose,” says Dugdale, laughing.

“ At all events, it will only be for a day or two, as the Ponsonbys and the Blakes leave directly after Christmas. I'm awfully sorry about it, but you know my father is incorrigible—never happy unless he has the house in an overflowing state. We have even had to put some of the girls in rooms with two beds to get space for the others.”

“ Well, it's large enough to admit of half a dozen beds,” says Dugdale good-naturedly, as he enters the blue chamber and warms his hands thankfully before the huge fire burning in the grate. As he speaks he looks round him. It is, indeed, a charming room, handsomely furnished, and as comfortable as the soul of man could desire. The extra bed, with hang-

ing curtains of pale blue, to match the rest of the furniture, has been pushed into a corner, so as to take as little as possible from the grandeur of the "regular" bedstead that stands with its back up against the central wall of the apartment; as though resenting the intrusion of the foreigner.

"Well, hurry up, and let's get down to the dining-room," says Oswald: "I've a lot to say to you."

So much, indeed, that the night is far advanced before his say is said—the fact that he has lately become engaged to "the dearest girl in the world" having a good deal to do with this protracted conversation. Three o'clock has struck, and the distant sounds of merriment that reached them from the billiard-room have long since died into nothingness, when at length Dick Dugdale, rising from his chair, declares with a yawn that sleep has mastered him.

He is a tall, lean, soldierly young man of about twenty-nine, with a singularly handsome face and a skin browned by India's suns. He has, indeed, only just returned from the East—a good deal the slier for his sojourn there—and being heart-whole, and next heir to a baronetcy, has been, during the past week, the subject of some speculation amongst the women assembled at Travers Court.

"You won't lose your way, will you?" says Oswald, as he bids him good night on coming to a landing where their roads separate. "You know the house too well for that."

"I *should*," says Dugdale, laughing. "This house has been my home too often to let a few years destroy all memory of it."

He goes softly down the corridor that leads to his room, calling out a last subdued good night, and walking delicately, as Agag might, lest he should disturb the slumberers on

either hand. A vague suspicion that perhaps after all he *doesn't* know his own room as well as he had believed, rouses a mingled sense of consternation and amusement in his mind, so that when he comes to his door he opens it cautiously and not without a certain sense of trepidation.

All right, however ! The large chamber presents itself to him in colours blue as the sky ; the fire still burns as cheerily upon the hearth as it did three hours ago. Capital servants the Traverses always *have* kept, by the way—unless, indeed, the present glowing furnace is to be attributed to the zeal of his sleeping partner in this room. By the way, what sort is he ?

Flinging the coat he has just taken off upon a chair near him, he turns his gaze upon the bed at the farthest end of the room—the bed in the corner ; the bed appropriated to the steady, quiet, respectable nineteen-year-old lad, warranted not to bite, of whom Oswald had spoken in such glowing terms, to find it—empty. Mechanically he directs his attention upon the bed proper to find it—full !

Why, confound that Ormsby boy ! Was there ever such impertinence—such sybaritish selfishness ? His heart, however, melts within him as he gazes upon what there is to be seen of this model of iniquity. What a *small* head ! with what a wealth of curling hair ! A mere boy it must be, in sore want of a barber.

A timid boy, too—evidently afraid of ghosts or such-like midnight visitants, as he has tucked the clothes right round his neck, and *almost* over his head. A mere child he must be, with brows as white as that, and with breathing so soft, so noiseless, that one might well believe him dead.

Dead ! Dugdale had heard of corpses being discovered

in double-bedded rooms before this—it is, indeed, quite an orthodox good old story ; but to have it come *home* to him in this abrupt way is not half so pleasant as the mild imagining of it. To read of a tragedy is one thing ; to be mixed up with it is quite another.

Taking up the candle, he advances quickly towards the bed, and looks down upon the owner of those short brown curls.

Great heaven ! what is this ? By a miracle alone Dugdale prevents the candlestick from falling with a crash to the floor ; by a miracle, too, he represses the exclamation that rises to his lips. The steady, respectable Ormsby boy, “ warranted not to bite,” has resolved himself into—*a girl !*

And such a lovely girl, too ! The little, pretty, soft, dishevelled curls, brown as hazel-nuts, are lying on a forehead white as Parian marble. The rounded cheeks are flushed with sleep’s fond heat, the long dark lashes lying on them making a tender contrast with the crimson ground beneath ; the lips, red as cherries ripe, are softly, indolently closed. It occurs to him that they might open at any moment, and then——

Well, THEN ! not the lips, but the eyes open. Large dark eyes, heavy with slumber scarcely broken ; and for an instant they gaze straight up at him, vaguely troubled—softly uncertain. Up to this point Dugdale has been rooted to the spot. To say that he is filled with amazement would be but to give a poor explanation of his feelings : that he is frightened to death would be far nearer to it. Now, seeing those half-conscious eyes on his, he gives way altogether.

Hastily extinguishing the tell-tale candle, he makes a dash for his coat, and then for the door, and rushes blindly down

the now dark corridor. Towards the end, seeing a light gleaming from one of the apartments, he makes for it in desperation, and—yes—thank Heaven, there are two beds here also, the room is distinctly blue—he must have found his haven at last.

Sinking into a chair, he presses his hand to his forehead, and listens with all his might. Will she scream? rouse the house? Has she mistaken him for a burglar? Or—blessed hope!—has she been so little awakened that his rapid exit may have left her under the impression that all she saw was but the outcome of a dream?

Somewhat relieved by this thought, he prepares once more for bed. *This* time, at all events, he has made no mistake,—the loud and healthy snores that come from the couch in the corner preclude the smallest possibility of doubt. All, then, may yet be well. That one hasty glance of hers could have told her nothing, and there is no other clue. Placing his fingers in his waistcoat pocket to take out his watch, he at once grows rigid with consternation, and a look of horror overspreads his face! His watch! He has left it behind him! It is probably at this moment ticking away—with quite disgraceful indifference to its owner's agony—upon *her* table! Alas for that dream theory of his! Dreams come and go, but leave nothing tangible behind them.

* * * * *

“I say, where's Lilian?” asks Oswald, looking up from the game-pie he is discussing. “Not like her to be late.”

“No; she is generally up to time,” says Lady Rattleton, a lively looking blonde, casting a sharp glance all round the breakfast-table. “She didn't like that beating you

gave her at billiards last night, perhaps ; or else for once in her life she is lazy."

"Wrong in both surmises," says Lady Travers, glancing from behind the huge silver urn, as the door opens and a little slight girl, almost childlike in face and form, comes into the room. Very nervously she comes forward, changing from white to red and from red back again to white, as she does so. "Well, Lily ! come at last, dear ?"

Dugdale's heart gives a big jump. That pretty head, with its short nut-brown curls, harmless as it seems, strikes terror to his soul. He grows almost vehement in his attentions to his left-hand neighbour—a gaunt old man with spectacles. Anything rather than meet the eyes of this little hesitating new-comer.

"Glad you've come, Lilian. We were just going to have the lake dragged."

"Really, Miss Englethorpe, you should give us notice when you intend to retire into private life. The anxiety we have undergone would——"

"Slept it out, Lil ?" questions her brother, a tall Guardsman, who is at the sideboard busy with a ham.

"She looks rather as if she hadn't slept at all," says Sir George Travers, her kindly host, drawing a chair up close to his own, and beckoning her to come to him.

"That blue room is haunted," says Augusta, the eldest daughter of the house : "I warned you about it, Lil. Well, what did you see ? Who entered your room last night ? Let us hear the ghastly details."

Poor Miss Englethorpe ! Dugdale's heart dies within him as he sees the cruel crimson that, rising, colours her cheeks.

"By Jove, I think you've hit it!" says her brother, mightily amused by this blush. (Brothers ARE such brutes!) "Come, tell us, Lily! The actual person who sees a ghost is so much preferable to the person who knows somebody else who has seen a ghost. Was it a man?"

Good-breeding so far stands to Miss Englethorpe that, though now deadly pale, she refuses further to betray herself. As for Dugdale, gazing on that brave little face, he feels as if he *must* rise and say something. But what? That is the question that reduces him to absolute nothingness.

"Had he his head under his arm?" persists Lady Rattleton, with the loud laugh that is commonly, and rather justly, supposed to proclaim the vacant mind.

"Or a dripping sword, perchance," says the Guardsman, who, being her brother, is of course the last man in the world to ever dream of looking at her.

"Come, come, come," cries Sir George quickly. "A truce to all such idle jests. Can't you see that the little one has a headache? A cup of tea for her, Oswald: *that* will exorcise the demon, I hope! Have you seen the last about these Whitechapel murders? Eh?—eh? Such a disgrace as they are to civilisation." And so on. The good old host compels them all to follow him far away from Miss Englethorpe and her worries.

"Now, once for all, we *must* be in time to decorate the church," says Augusta Travers presently, who is commonly supposed to be an admirer of the rector's—a happy, *unmarried* man! "We have only this one clear day before us, and we'll hardly get our work through before Christmas dawns."

"What hour are we to meet at the church?"

"Half-past eleven, sharp."

"And it is now—— By Jove, what *is* it, now, by anything reliable?" asks Oswald, staring at the clock on the mantelpiece, that points stolidly to twenty past two. That clock has gone down. I say, Dugdale, you are the last-comer from the seat of war: give us the news—the time."

We have all heard of the word "limp." It, and it only, describes Dugdale at this moment.

"Eh?" says he, with a view to gaining time. An awful consciousness that two large brown eyes are at this instant fixed upon him renders him almost paralysed.

"My dear fellow, straight from town as you are, you can of course give us the right time."

"There you overrate my strength," says Dugdale, recovering himself by a supreme effort. "The fact is, I was so tired last night that I forgot to wind my watch, and when I looked at it this morning I found it had meanly run down. So sorry!"

He quite forgets to hope that Heaven will forgive him this pious fib in his anxiety to see how *she* has taken it. She has evidently taken it most satisfactorily. The white and frightened face that was turned on him a moment since now looks half-relieved. That "*I looked at it this morning*" had been very clever: she had accepted it as the noble truth. She is still timid, unnerved; but her glances are no longer directed specially towards him: they are divided amongst the other men sitting all round the table.

As they rise from the latter, Augusta comes up to Dugdale.

"I think you and Miss Englethorpe are the two people

unknown to each other," says she. "That should be a bond of union between you." She laughs the little unctuous laugh peculiar to stout people, and introduces Dugdale to Lilian.

"Now, don't be half a century getting into your walking things," says she to Miss Englethorpe. "You have a big day's work before you in the church. Persuade Captain Dugdale to give you his assistance, and you will make the parish your friend for ever."

At this, Miss Englethorpe says a word or two, as in duty bound, and Captain Dugdale answers it; the result being that the former finds herself behind a pair of ponies half an hour later with the latter holding the reins. This conjunction brings them speedily to the church doors, where divers spoken plans for celebrating Christmas are making the air loud.

Miss Englethorpe, being of an energetic turn of mind, soon separates herself from the idle members of the flock, and gives herself to the working section thereof.

Holly, ivy, and certain hothouse plants sent in from the conservatories around, are scattered profusely about the altar and all down the aisles. The rector, clad in distinctly mundane garments, is moving about briskly from pillar to post giving instructions to the unlearned—a large class.

Quite towards the end of the afternoon Miss Englethorpe, finding herself alone at the base of the pulpit with an ivy wreath in her hands that cries aloud for some resting-place, looks round her, and sees at a distance Dugdale. He is coming towards her, and smiles as he meets her eyes; but what is there about him that kills the answering smile that had risen to her lips? Dugdale gives

a hasty side-glance at himself, and finds he is in his shirt-sleeves—having flung off his coat awhile ago to go to work with a greater zeal. Good heavens! he was in his shirt-sleeves that last, that *first* time she saw him! Could it be possible that a remembrance of that unfortunate moment is slowly wakening within her? What if she should ever arrive at a *certainty* about that fatal mistake of his?

Making a hasty snatch at his coat, he flings that unoffending garment over the tell-tale shirt with quite an angry air, and turns once more to Miss Englethorpe.

"Now, what can I do for you?" says he, with as unconcerned a manner as he can assume at so short a notice, and with his heart beating to a very violent degree.

"Nothing, thank you," returns she icily, moving abruptly away; and then, as if ashamed of her petulance, or not knowing positively that she has reason for it, she looks round at him. "Well, there is this," she says, with hesitation, glancing at her wreath: "where shall I put it?"

"I'll show you," says he briskly, a weight lifted from his heart. After all, she does *not* know. And what a lovely face it is that now is looking into his!—not however, without a strange suppressed anxiety, that might be called doubt, visible in it.

To combat this doubt he makes the object of his life for the next half-hour, and is congratulating himself that he has succeeded, when suddenly Miss Englethorpe puts hope on that subject to flight.

"What o'clock is it?" asks she, *so* nervously that it is impossible not to notice her agitation. Dugdale makes a laudable effort to conquer the situation, and fumbles in the pocket where that confounded watch *should* be as

thoroughly as though he honestly believes it is there to be found.

"Oh, by Jove! of *course*," says he, "I forgot I hadn't wound it last night, and that it still lies on my table. Let me tell you a secret" (speaking carefully, but rather fast): "I am one of those fellows, you know, who *hate* a watch and never wear 'em, if they can get out of it."

"No, I don't know any of them," says Miss Englethorpe slowly. He can feel her own eyes upon his face, and after a swift glance knows that they are full of tears, frightened, *shamed* tears! Her whole soul is in these anxious eyes, and he understands instinctively that it is the uncertainty of it all that is so terribly distressing her. He feels like a murderer as he sees the tears, and he feels too, with greater justice, that he is developing into a most consummate liar.

"Well, now you know *one*," says he, with what he tells himself is quite an awful sprightliness. "A watch to me is a bore, hardly to be endured. Just now and again it is a useful thing, I dare say; but as a rule—— I should not wonder, for instance, if you never saw me with mine the whole time I am here."

"What a pity! Is—is it a nice watch?" asks Miss Englethorpe, with what he is pleased to see somewhat recovered spirits.

"Far from it" (promptly). "Beastly old thing: silver. My father gave it to me, or I shouldn't carry it with me at all."

Alas for the generosity of that good father, whose gift had most assuredly been golden!

But Lilian (he has already, even at this early stage of

their acquaintance, begun to so designate her) is for the time satisfied, and what is a father in comparison with a pretty girl? For the rest of the evening everything goes smoothly between her and Dugdale; and the next day, Christmas Day, passes without a hitch, and is indeed remembered by both long afterwards as having been the happiest they had ever spent. If at times Miss Englethorpe feels little icy thrills of fear stealing over her as she thinks of that watch lying perdu beneath her laces upstairs (she had been afraid to put it in her jewel-case, the girls in the house having quite a mania for overhauling that charming receptacle), she resolutely puts such fears behind her, and with as good courage as she can enjoys the present. Sooner or later she knows she will have to stand face to face with her midnight visitor, will have to return that watch, and thereby bring utter confusion upon her head; but until then, let her be happy. Her one devout prayer, incessantly breathed, is—that whoever it is that terrible apparition may resolve itself into, it will *not* be Dugdale. Oh no, not Captain Dugdale, *any* one but him; and surely it couldn't be he. She has his own word for it, or nearly so. *His* watch—that mysterious one he hates so much, that seemingly no man has ever yet seen—is silver, whilst hers—that is, *his*—that is, the WRETCH'S—is gold! No; he, Captain Dugdale, would not wilfully deceive her, and yet— Always an unwelcome doubt remains behind.

Aid to this doubt is given from the most unexpected sources. Human spite has nothing to do with it, as no one can possibly know anything about the fiasco save she and—that other. Some impalpable imp must have taken

it in hand, and found its pleasure in tormenting her. The first shock had come at that memorable breakfast; the second, when she had seen Dugdale for the first time (*was* it the first time?) in his shirt sleeves, in the church; the third arose out of the *tableaux vivants* that the Travers girls would get up. These doubts have all to do with Dugdale; but besides these she is harassed with speculations as to other guests in the house. Dugdale apparently is not the only one who does not possess, or can't at all events produce, a watch. The Hon. Bertie Lightwood, a near-sighted little mortal, more dead than alive, never wears one; and George Hardup, a stalwart dragoon, *says* he has left his in town to be repaired.

In the tableaux it so happens that Miss Englethorpe and Captain Dugdale are cast for the scene from Tennyson's *Sleeping Beauty*, where the latter is roused from her sleep of a hundred years by a kiss from the wandering Prince. The other tableaux had gone off pretty well. Lady Rattleton, indeed, as Diana Vernon, had scored a distinct success, and Oswald Travers with his fiancée, a gentle little thing, with intelligent eyes, were warmly applauded as Una and the Lion; there had, indeed, been some difficulty about the get-up of Oswald as that remarkable beast—he was the lion—but when he had been smothered in two bear, three opossum, and one leopard skins, he was considered a very creditable article indeed. He was, at all events, unique of his kind, and that is everything.

But a little whisper floats about that *The Sleeping Beauty* is to be the event of the evening; and now, as the curtain slowly (and with several heart-stirring checks) rises, rumour for the third or fourth time proves true. Beyond

all doubt Miss Englethorpe *is* a Beauty ! Every man in the room, and even a few women, acknowledge this undeniable fact.

Lying there upon the crimson-covered couch in her delicate white robes, with her nut-brown curls nestling amongst the red velvet of the cushions, Lilian Englethorpe looks lovely as a happy dream. The exquisite face is colourless, save for the scarlet lips and the dark lashes lying on the oval cheek. If that dead past beauty of olden time, so dear to fairy lore and poets, were but half as fair as this her modern representative, no wonder the Prince lost his head, but gained his courage, and made her his by that revivifying kiss !

So thinks Dugdale, as, compelled by his part—but yet a very willing servant—he bends over her. How sweet she looks ! How kind ! Yet, if she knew all, would she not spurn him ? *All*—yet how little ! How delicately the lashes lie upon that perfect cheek ! Oh that the curtain might stay up for ever ! Oh that he dared, as did that old-world lover, to stoop and kiss and wake her into a new life—a life of love for him !

The curtain, however, like time, takes heed of no man. Down it comes with a little bang : so suddenly that Dugdale, lost in his trance of admiration, forgets all about it. It is only when the large dark eyes open and look straight up into his impassioned ones that the fact of its descent dawns upon him. That fact, and another too. With a little sharp exclamation, Miss Englethorpe springs to her feet, flings back the crimson coverings that had partially covered her, and for a moment stands pale, defiant, horror-stricken before him. What is she thinking of ? *What ?* It seems

to him, in the midst of his consternation, that he *knows* ! Again he sees himself in that blue chamber, looking down upon the sleeping girl. Again she wakes. Again her eyes uplift themselves to his—as they do now.

Miss Englethorpe has taken a step nearer to him ; she has lifted her hand as though she would have spoken to him. There is in the strange deep glance of her eyes something of absolute agony. Her lips part.

All at once she turns aside, her hand falls to her side, and abruptly, nay brusquely, she passes him by, and disappears by the amateur wing.

Dugdale, who has grown a little pale, is the only one left to receive the plaudits of the assembled county.

* * * * *

She puts in no appearance at breakfast next morning, and Dugdale's heart sinks lower within him (if that be possible). Late in the afternoon, at the five o'clock tea, that seems to delight everybody, but at which *She* (really he has begun to regard her, so far as name is concerned, almost as the heroine of Mr. Haggard's novel) is also absent ; and strolling leisurely into the library where this mild dissipation is, as a rule, carried out to its bitter end, Dugdale becomes aware of that crushing fact. He has hardly had his own cup, however, which neither cheers nor inebriates him, when a door opening on his left causes him to turn.

Yes, it is she. But a very pale and nervous she. A "she," too, fighting evidently against odds, that are of a spiritual nature and not open to the public. Dugdale, looking at her, feels puzzled.

His ignorance, however, is of short continuance. Miss Englethorpe has not been two minutes in the room

when somebody — Lady Rattleton, of course — says loudly :

“Whose watch is this?” As she speaks she lifts a gold watch from a small table at her elbow, with chain attached, and holds it up, as if for auction, to those around.

Dugdale’s heart grows still. That it is his watch goes without telling. That *she*, unable longer to endure the suspense, unable, too, to retain so valuable an article, has at last decided on braving the worst, is clear to him. She had come in, had laid that vile timepiece upon the table, unseen by any one, and now, when all the guests are assembled, is waiting to learn—the truth.

Well, she sha’n’t hear it from him at all events.

“A fine thing!—a very fine thing! And who is the owner of this fine thing?” cries Lady Rattleton, in her shrill tones, dangling the watch to and fro, and challenging all men present. “Yours, Oswald? No? Yours, Mr. Lightwood? Yours, Sir George?” to her host. “No, really? It looks like an heirloom. Well, come, it must be yours, Captain Dugdale.”

For a moment Dugdale hesitates : it is a hesitation so slight as to be almost unfelt—but in the most infinitesimal space of time quite a train of thoughts can present themselves. If he repudiates the watch now, he can never claim it again, and it is an old friend, the companion of many a year, and dear to him, as inanimate things sometimes will be. But not to deny all knowledge of it, with those large searching eyes gazing at him from the other end of the room, waiting breathlessly, as it seems, for his answer, is impossible to him.

“Mine? No,” says he, shaking his head, with a smile.

"Must belong to some of the other fellows. They'll claim it when they come in," says Oswald indifferently, as Lady Rattleton puts back the watch on the table where she had found it. Dugdale breathes more freely, and lets his glance turn to where Lilian has but just now been standing.

She has gone into the embrasure of the window, however, and is sitting there on a pile of cushions, chatting with apparent gaiety with a young man, who is holding a teacup for her. She has not disbelieved him, then? Once again he has escaped detection. Surely she could not laugh like that if she doubted. Yet—strange perversity—he almost wishes she *had* doubted, that she *knew*, that it was all over and she had forgiven him. A growing dislike to the young man to whom she is making herself so agreeable, mingled, with a sort of discomfort, hardly to be placed, induces him to leave the gay party round the tea-table and wander somewhat aimlessly into the music-room, a charming apartment, hung with pale pink cretonne, and with a huge bow-window facing south.

At this hour of the day it is sure to be deserted and free from fear of chance visitors. Glad in this thought, Dugdale stands moodily in the window chewing the cud of several bitter thoughts, when a light but hurried step behind causes him to turn. *Who* can be coming now?

It seems to him that he hardly knows her, as she stops short before him, her lips parted, and her breath coming and going so rapidly that it almost appears to hurt her. Her agitation is so extreme that involuntarily he puts out his hand as though to support her, but she shrinks from him.

"Here," she says. "Take it. There is no reason you should lose it because—because of me!"

It is his watch she is offering him! Losing his head a little—his agitation now being even greater than her own—he would once more have denied all knowledge of it; but she restrains him.

"Oh no, *no*, no!" cries she, with sudden intense passion. "Do not say it again. It is useless. I *know*! I think I have known it all along."

She places the watch upon an ottoman near her, and makes a movement towards the door. Something tells him that if she goes now, it will be for ever. With a touch of desperation in his manner he gets before her, and places his back against the door.

"Do not go like this," says he, his face as white as her own. "Let me say a word or two. Just *hear* me! After all, what was it? Lilian, let me speak."

He has put out both his hands and tried to take hers, but with a sharp little gesture she repulses him, and then—all at once, as it were—she covers her face and breaks into a wild and bitter fit of crying; not loud sobs, but low and heavy, that shake all her slender frame. Turning abruptly from him, as though ashamed of this uncontrollable outburst, she hurries behind the curtains of the window, and leaning against the woodwork, cries as despairingly as a broken-hearted child.

"Is it worth such grief as this?" says Dugdale miserably, following her into the embrasure of the window. "It was only a mistake, when all is told. Mine—and an inexcusable one if you will—but not worth one of these cruel tears. I can't think *how* it happened, how I was so stupid; but——"

"Don't speak of it. I can't bear it!" cries she, with a stamp of her small foot.

"Far better speak of it, and be done with it for ever," says Dugdale. "You have been making a mountain out of a mere molehill; and if you won't let me show it to you as it really is, you will go on being miserable about it always."

"Very well; I'd *rather* be miserable," says Miss Englethorpe from behind her handkerchief; "though" (another sob), "if I am to be as miserable as this always, I shall soon die; that's *one* comfort."

"Not to me," says Dugdale. "Have you no pity for me? Do you think *I* have suffered nothing? That every nervous glance of yours has not been an agony to me? If I deserved punishment for my offence—which truly was an innocent one—why! I have endured it a thousand times. If you could forgive me now—if——"

"Oh! if it had been any one but *you*!" says she, so naïvely, with such an unconscious betrayal of her real feeling for him, that Dugdale's heart beats high. Emboldened by this veiled admission, he very gently takes her in his arms, and presses her head down upon his shoulder.

"Why, if it had been, so much the worse," says he quickly. "You and I can keep the secret to ourselves, can we not? Lilian, may I tell you now, what you surely know already, but what I want so badly to put into words? I love you! Darling—*darling*, do you think you can like me—enough—to marry me?"

"Well, if it hadn't been for *that*," says she despondently; but considering she turns *to* him instead of *from* him as she makes this disheartening speech, Dugdale is not so much crushed by it as he ought to have been.

"If it hadn't been—you *could* have liked me?" asks he gently.

"Oh! what's the good of talking of it *now*?" says she, with a heavy sigh.

"Not much!" says Dugdale mournfully. "But just for argument's sake, answer me."

"Well—yes" (reluctantly).

"Then," says Dugdale, with a base descent into ordinary gladness, "I shall insist on your liking me now, too, in spite of that unfortunate——"

"Oh!" cries she hastily, "I don't mind that." She lifts one hand and lays it on his lips. "It is something else I want to talk to you about. Do you think a—that is—that one person could ever love another person, when those two persons have only seen each other for ten days?"

"If you and I are those two persons—yes," says Dugdale, with deep conviction.

"It is a very short time," says she doubtfully.

"The man who could see you for ten days and be still insensible to—— Well, never mind him; he would be beneath contempt," says Dugdale. "As for me, the very first time I ever saw you——"

"Oh, DON'T!" says she, hiding her face on his breast.

"On our very first introduction——"

"Dick! if you insist on talking about *that*—I—I *won't* marry you!" says she indignantly.

"And if I don't, you will?"

"Oh! you *know* it," says she, so shyly, so sweetly, that he feels earth has no more to offer him.

"And now, not another tear," says he presently, when

their raptures and explanations, and all the blessed vows that lovers from time immemorial have given and taken, have been gone through. "Here, take my handkerchief: yours is wet through. (Bless me, what ridiculous things girls use; to be sure!) Not another tear shall you shed all your life through if *I* can prevent it. But there is one thing that has always puzzled me. May I ask you about it?"

"Is—is it about *that*?" (nervously).

"Yes. I want to know why both the rooms were blue?"

"That was Augusta's fault. She liked the old room so much—*yours*, that she had another done up like it—*mine*! I—I wish she hadn't."

"Well, I don't," says Dugdale. "One of the sweetest recollections of my life will be of a little soft brown curly head lying——"

Here Miss Englethorpe makes such a desperate effort to escape from his encircling arms, that he has to break off in the middle of his enthusiastic memories to circumvent her.

"Well, I won't—I swear it!" declares he. "Not another word on the subject shall pass my lips until we are such an ancient Darby and Joan that it will seem like a dream to us."

"Now, you PROMISE, mind," says she; and then pauses, so evidently full of a desire to say something else, that instinctively he says:

"Well?"

"There is just one thing that has troubled me most of all," confesses she, falling into a little whisper, and so

turning her head that he can't see her eyes. "Was—*that time*, you know—was my hair *very* crumpled? Was" (plucking nervously at the button of his coat)—"was I looking *very* dreadful?"

"Oh! darling heart! *How* could you look that?" cries he, straining her to his breast.

DAN CUPID."

SOMETIMES too hot the eye of Heaven shines. To-day proves it. Terrible is the strength of the rays that Old Sol is flinging broadcast upon the simmering earth. The tennis players have given in to it, and, confessing themselves vanquished, have flung their racquets to the winds and themselves into garden chairs, or else prone upon the shaven lawn under the acacias, according to their sex and taste.

Two of them, however, have wandered rather far from the acacias and the tea-tables and the tent where better things than tea can be had for the asking. They have wandered into a little green space, shut out from a noisy world by rows and rows of hedges, all beech on the north and south, and heavy rhododendrons on the two other sides. It is a little dream of a place, entered by one opening only, and that through the beeches.

"A sort of Arcadia, isn't it?" says Mr. Brooke, glancing up at his companion from his lounging position upon the grass at her feet.

"No," says she, with a little frown. She makes a charming picture, sitting here in the sunshine, next the old

sundial, with her hat lying on the ground beside her, and the glinting rays from the glowing heavens throwing golden lights into her fine brown hair. Her eyes are blue, and just at this moment a little angry ; the mouth, too, so prone to laughter as a rule, has grown mutinous. Half child, half woman, she has not yet learned the more delicate shades of society's colours, and lets her thoughts lie openly upon her lovely face.

"You are hard to please," says he, his eyes on hers. As a rule, his eyes are seldom anywhere else.

"Well, *you* are not !" returns she promptly.

From afar the thrum, thrum, thrum of a banjo comes to them, breaking a stillness that is almost oppressive.

"That's the unkindest cut of all !" says Mr. Brooke placidly. "It's rather a cut at Miss Morland, too, isn't it ? I presume you allude to my engagement to her."

"You presume very wrongly, then. I was not thinking of Miss Morland. She ought to please. She is rich, young, handsome."

"Rich—yes."

"And *handsome* ?" (persistently).

"Is she ? Oh yes, of course she is ! A perfect Juno ! Too perfect a Juno, perhaps !"

"You shouldn't sneer at her," says the girl gravely.

"I know that, and that's why I do it," says he. "It is so difficult to resist temptation, and to do the wrong thing is always so pleasant." He is talking idly, scarcely knowing what he says, his mind full of her : full of the knowledge that he loves her—her only, and with all the passion of his nature—and that he is engaged to be married to another woman !

A handsome woman, the daughter and heiress of a cotton merchant—what her own class would call a "fine girl"; tall, with light eyes and lighter hair, and distinctly underbred, she had met George Brooke some months ago at the house of a mutual friend, and being filled with a strong desire to rise out of her cotton surroundings, had given him very clearly to understand that she was willing to accept *him*, should *he* choose to accept her fortune, which was enormous, in exchange for the old title that must come to him on the death of his uncle, Lord Farnham. A beggarly title—no penny of money coming with it, as the uncle let the nephew know whenever an opportunity occurred. There had been bad blood between Lord Farnham and his second brother, George Brooke's father, and Farnham was not a man to forget. He swore he would visit the sin of the father upon the son, and sooner than let his money go to the young George he would leave it to a hospital. As for the old name, and the keeping up of it, let it go to the devil. Young George would inherit that in spite of him, but it should prove a barren honour to him.

George took no steps to assuage his uncle's wrath, but he thought a good deal of the time when he should be Lord Farnham, with only £500 a year to back his title. He had shirked the idea of marrying for money; but when Miss Morland, with her undeniable golden charms, flung herself at his head, he permitted himself to argue the question. Many a fellow, he reflected, had done it before. It was a fair exchange. *His* title for *her* money! He was heart-whole. He would not do her or any other woman any wrong in marrying her. He would think about it—he hesitated—and finally was lost.

Miss Morland accepted him calmly. Was a little vulgar over her money—let it be known that she thought it a pity that the present Lord Farnham was in such remarkably robust health for so old a man; and said she would not like to be married until the coming autumn. It was then November. George, glad of a respite, did not press for an earlier day—a circumstance the heiress remembered. He bore up under his new chains with a marvellous courage. He was not in love with any one, so they did not gall him. Then came a day when both he and Miss Morland were asked down to stay for a month at the Shirleys,' and there he met Dorothy Dene !

A little slender maiden, with big grey eyes, and hair that rippled all over her white forehead. A rather out-at-elbows little maiden, whose best frock was a muslin, and whose only ornaments were roses. The Shirleys—a young couple—adored her, and would have her to stay with them as often as ever the old Squire, her father, would let her come to them. She had been taken forcible possession of by them from the month that saw George Brooke there and his fiancée—with the most disastrous results. George Brooke fell madly in love with her, and she loved him.

It has gone so far with them, indeed, that, though no word has yet been spoken, each knows the other's heart; and as they sit here to-day, in this little dangerously lonely retreat, a sense of passionate protest against the fate that is dividing them thrills through every tone.

"We ought to go back," says Miss Dene presently, in a rather changed tone. She had been a little offended, perhaps, by the frivolity of his answer.

"Oh ! not yet, surely ! We have been here so short a

time ; and to get away from Shirley's banjo, if only for a minute or two, is so intense a relief."

"It is more than a minute or two" (rising). "We have been here an immense time. Agnes (Mrs. Shirley) will be wondering what has become of us,—so" (regarding him steadily) "will Miss Morland."

"Let her wonder ! Besides, she has forgotten us by this time in the delight of Lord Tottenham's society. I wonder what she sees in that old fossil ? For my part, I'm always thinking when with him of what I *don't* see—hair, teeth, etc."

"She is very kind to him—poor old man."

"And amiability is her strong point. How many charms you have discovered in her of late !"

"I don't think you ought to speak of her like that," says the girl, turning upon him with a little flash in her lovely eyes. "You shouldn't criticise her."

"Why not ? I certainly sha'n't be able to criticise her next month, so I may as well make the most of my time now. Next month"—slowly and almost defiantly—"I shall be the blest proprietor of Mrs. Brooke ; and it is not permissible to criticise one's *own* wife, whatever you may do with regard to your friend's."

He has spoken deliberately, and with seeming unconcern, though in truth his heart is torn in two by a very passion of despair and regret. They are both standing, but she has turned sharply aside, and has so placed herself that he cannot see her face. He had meant to provoke some word from her, and her silence maddens him.

"What are you thinking of ?" asks he angrily, going up to her and compelling her to return his gaze.

She has grown very pale ; but she meets his eyes without flinching.

"Nothing," says she, in a tone out of which all her courage cannot keep the sound of desolation.

"A woman's answer : I know what you were thinking of, for all that. That there is no more despicable thing on earth than a man who marries a woman for her money. Yet what was I to do ? Was the old name to be for ever lowered ? A title—and £500 a year—how do they go together ? Money I felt that I must have, and when it came my way I took it. Do you think I don't care—*now* ? But the thing is done ! And my uncle—that old man—he is a perfect devil : he will do nothing for me. I am tied—am bound."

"Yes," says she simply. She has taught herself indeed to regard it in this light. Of very old family herself, the demands of race seem natural to her. To give up all for the sake of the old name—*that* has reason in it ; but that it *should be they two* who must give up, that seems hard !

"Why don't you speak ?" says he harshly. "You despise me ; you think——"

"I think nothing but what is kind of you," says she, her voice trembling, but her face full of a gentle dignity. "I do not despise you. Why should I ? I think you are doing right. When an old title comes to one, it should be regarded as a sacred charge ; and you—you meant to do the best you could for it. You will be able, in spite of your uncle, to keep up the old name——"

"Oh ! confound the old name !" interrupts he passionately—with a deep groan. He has spoken very low, certainly—and certainly it seems as though the word had been forced from him against his will ; but Dorothy hearing this terrible speech

grows dumb. To so denounce the "old name"! She pauses, gazing at him as if thunderstruck.

"I beg your pardon," says he moodily. *Why* has she taken it all so much for granted? Is there *no* loophole of escape? If she had cared as much as he does, would she have been so ready to acknowledge the claims of the "old name"? "Do you never think, Dorothy," says he slowly, "of how it might have been if—if——"

With a little swift, imperative gesture she puts up her hand and checks him. Her very lips are white; her large eyes grow suddenly larger, as cruel, smarting tears fill them. Even while Brooke gazes at her, two bright drops overflow her lids and run quickly down her pale cheeks.

"Dorothy!" says he, making a movement towards her.

"No, no. Don't mind me!" says she bravely, repulsing him with eager hands. "You are doing what is best for you, indeed; and—and afterwards you will be glad that—— Yes——" (nervously), "and besides——"

"Oh, that will do," says he, bitterly. "Why should you trouble yourself to try and reconcile me to my fate? I dare say there are worse things that might befall a man than having to accept a fortune."

"I wish," says she, in a heartbroken voice, "that you would try to be a little happy about it."

"Is there anything else you wish?" says he, pushing off his arm the little friendly hand she has placed upon it. "Happy after all!" (throwing up his head, with a short laugh); "why not?"

"Why not, indeed?" sadly. "This is only a moment's folly on your part; every other day you are as merry as the best of us; to-morrow you will be yourself again."

"How well you have studied me! You are right: I am the most frivolous, the most light-hearted of my sex. Sometimes," says he, laughing again, "I'm so happy that I wish——" He pauses.

"Yes?"

"*That I was dead!*" says he—with such a sudden vehement change from affected carelessness to honest misery that her heart dies within her. Fear takes possession of her.

"Oh no! Oh no!" cries she, her voice dying away in a sob. Instinctively she moves towards him—his arms open—in a moment she is lying on his breast.

"Oh! *don't* wish yourself dead," sobs she, crying bitterly.

"I don't now," whispers he, folding his arms round the slender, beloved little form.

"I ought not to be here. I oughtn't indeed," says she, making, however, no effort to redeem her position. "There is Miss Morland to think of."

"There is indeed!" he says ruefully. It is a cheerful ruefulness, however. With his world in his arms he can afford to fight with outsiders. And he was *not* wrong, after all. She *does* love him.

"Couldn't you——" begins Miss Dene, and then breaks off.

"Couldn't I what, darling?"

"Couldn't you break it off with her?" whispers she into the right side of his coat.

Hah! *This* was what he wanted!

"I could," says he, laughing softly, and pressing the pretty head against his heart with his hand; "and I *will*!"

"I wouldn't say a word—not a syllable," says Dorothy,

with awful determination, "if she *loved* you—but she doesn't!" (This decidedly, with all the impenetrable perspicacity of youth, that *never* reasons, yet always *knows*)

"No?" (meekly). "I confess that idea has occurred to myself; but if my personal charms are a matter of indifference to her, why then has she done me the honour to accept me?"

"They say," says Miss Dorothy, lifting her limpid eyes to his, with all the importance this time-honoured authority ought to produce—"that you want to marry her for her money, and that she wants to marry you for your title."

"*Do* they?" says Mr. Brooke. "As a rule, the mighty 'they' are always right, but for once they are at fault. If she wants to marry me for my title, I'm sorry for her: firstly, because I'm going to marry some one else; and secondly, because if I *did* marry her, the coveted title would not be her's until her hair was grey, the old boy being about as strong at present as any annuitant. And as for me, I most solemnly swear I don't want to marry her, either for her money or anything else."

"Ah! But you *did*," says she.

"Even if so, *you* should not be the one to reproach me, says he.

"Yes. That's true. I'm bound to you," says she, nestling closer to him. "And" (in an awed tone) "when will you tell her about it, George?"

She hesitates so admirably over the pronouncing of his name that George laughs, and catching up her pretty hand kisses the pink palm of it with rapture.

"First thing to-morrow," says he. "To tell you the truth,

I think she has an inkling of it. She said something about you the other day that looked as if she was jealous."

"She couldn't be jealous—she doesn't love," says Dorothy, with conviction. "Oh!" (with a little long-drawn sigh), "it is dreadful to feel jealous."

"You needn't have felt it," says he tenderly.

"But I *did*. I couldn't bear to think she was to belong to you, whilst I—— Well" (with a happy little sigh this time, that brings tears into her eyes), "I'm not jealous *now*. I wonder what she'll say to you?"

"Give me good-day, no doubt, and rejoice over a quittance of bad rubbish. After all, she was throwing herself away. A girl with a couple of millions might easily have made her own of a better match than I am likely to prove."

"She could have made no better match" (indignantly). "Oh!" (starting), "is that Agnes calling? Oh! *come*, let us run! We have been here a dreadfully long time."

"Till to-morrow, then," says he, catching her in his arms and kissing her. "To-morrow, I pray Heaven, will leave me free to tell all the world that I love you."

To-morrow, however, brings its own plans. With the hot water at eight which a man brings him, a veritable bombshell, in the shape of a letter, that blows all his intentions to pieces.

His uncle, Lord Farnham, is dead. So writes Lord Farnham's lawyer, and has left his nephew not only the title, which he couldn't keep from him, but his entire fortune, £14,000 a year. At the last the *name* had been too much for the old man. He had given his all for the keeping up of it. He had even given up his revenge; though, if he had known it, he could hardly have made his

nephew more unhappy than by the bestowal of this most unlooked-for gift.

How is he to go to Miss Morland now, and demand his liberty? With the title and the fortune, too, in both his hands, how is he to ask her to break off his engagement? His soul sinks like lead within him. It was such an open arrangement between them—she to give money, he the title—that now, when he finds himself independent of her money, it seems impossible to ask her to let him go free from the detested bond.

A last fight for life animates him. He will seek an interview with Miss Morland after breakfast, and put the case fairly before her. If she still elect to adhere to their original contract—so be it. Good-bye then to life and joy and happiness! The honour that alone remains will be but a poor comforter. His knowledge of Miss Morland tells him that she will be very likely to assert her rights, and decide on keeping her hold of title and estate. He manages to ask her for a few minutes *alone* with him before leaving the breakfast-room. Something new in her face as she answers him—granting the required interview—strikes him at the moment, but not forcibly. Of late her moods have been very variable.

"Now?" asks he.

"The sooner the better," returns she shortly. "The library is always vacant at this hour. Shall we go there?"

"A good place," says he, trying to look calm, whilst his heart is thumping violently against his side, as though it would burst its bonds.

"Look here," says Miss Morland, as she closes the library door behind him: "one word is as good as ten"

(this is the usual graceful style in which she carries on her conversation). "I know quite well why you are here, and I may as well have the first word. You are sick of me, and I'm sick of you. That's it—isn't it?"

"Really——!" begins Brooke feebly. He is indeed so overpowered by the brilliancy of this attack, that he finds words difficult to him.

"The fact is," goes on Miss Morland, waving his attempt at a reply aside with a gesture of her large firm hand, "I don't think there is the remotest chance of the old gentleman dying—Farnham, you know; and you without the title aren't good enough."

"I can quite understand *that*," says he gravely, shocked at her coarseness. "It is, however, a pity you didn't think of that sooner. I presume it was never me, then?—it was only the title?"

"Well, as far as that goes," says she, "I presume it was never *me* either: it was only the money." At this he colours hotly. She laughs. "Does that trouble you?" says she. "Well, money clings to money, you know; and I have decided that one in the hand is worth two in the bush." (This is a dark saying to him, but time explains it.) "The truth is, I saw Lord Farnham in town just before I came down here, and he looks as if he would last for ever—as if he would never get older."

"No, he will never get older," repeats Brooke, in a curious tone. With the old man lying dead, this heartless speech of hers—this cruel longing for his death—sounds even more detestable than it would have done were he living. He himself had not loved the old Lord, but he had never wished him dead.

"As to that, I suppose he will have to, whether he likes it or not," says she vindictively. "But I don't feel inclined to wait for him. And—er—as Lord Tottenham——"

"Yes?" says he, his heart giving a great bound.

"As Lord Tottenham asked me last night to marry him, I decided that it would be better to bring our engagement to an end."

"I am to understand, then, that you are about to marry Lord Tottenham?" asks he formally, subduing all expression of his passionate relief by a supreme effort.—So Tottenham was "the bird in the hand"! A tough one, truly!

"Exactly so."

"You are wise in your own generation," says he, with a passing smile; "and sound in your proverbs."

"You don't express much regret, at all events!" says she, with a shrill laugh. "I am wise in *this* at least, that I don't care about dividing my husband's affections with another. That little girl, to whom you give your whole time, will no doubt be glad to share with you your £500 a year."

This is unbearable.

"If you allude to Miss Dene," says he quietly, though his face is pale and his eyes flashing, "I do not think she gives her entire thoughts to money. £500 a year, however, would, I acknowledge, be but a poor thing to lay at her feet. I am glad, therefore that it is now in my power to offer her £14,000."

"What?" says Miss Morland. She takes a step forward. Dismay, consternation, discomfiture, are all largely knit on her astonished face.

"Lord Farnham died at 10 o'clock last night. Contrary to

my expectations, he has left me every penny he possessed." He bows, and moves towards the door.

"Stay—one moment!" gasps Miss Morland. If she has even one small grain of hope left that she may be Lady Farnham, his next words destroy it.

"You must pardon me," says he; "I have an appointment with Miss Dene. She has not yet heard my news. Ah! Lord Tottenham" (to that carefully preserved old beau, as he most opportunely enters the room). "Permit me to congratulate you. Miss Morland has just informed me of your engagement to her. I feel she has done wisely indeed. With much humility I confess myself very much the worse man of the two!"

He laughs, and hurries away to find Dorothy waiting for him in that little sacred spot he had named Arcadia yesterday. She rises as he comes towards her, and turns so deathly white that he is afraid she is going to faint.

"It is all right!" cries he joyfully, to reassure her. A little cry escapes her. She would have gone to him, but her limbs refuse to obey her, and if he had not caught her in his arms she would have fallen. There is no restorative power so effectual as a lover's kiss. Dorothy is presently her charming self again.

"Oh! how did it happen?" cries she rapturously. "I prayed for it all last night, but somehow I never had much hope. She has given you up, then? Really?"

"Really and truly."

"Oh! how *could* she!" (leaning back from him to gaze into his dear face—the handsomest in the world to her).

"Well, it appears she *could* quite easily," says he, with a happy laugh. "You may think me good to look at, but

when compared with such a youthful Adonis as my Lord Tottenham, even *you* must allow that I ought to take a back seat."

"Do you mean to tell me" (with growing indignation) "that she has given you up for Lord Tottenham?"

"Even so, my good child."

"Pouf! She's a fool. She's not worth wasting words upon," says Miss Dene, with scornful conviction.

"That's what I think. Let's talk of ourselves," says he.

"Oh, as for that," says she, turning suddenly very dismal, and trying to give her head the properly dejected droop, "I dare say you will be sorry about all this later on. I have not been a good friend to you" (with a heavy sigh), "and that's the truth."

"What am I going to be sorry about?"

"You know! You said yesterday that it would be dreadful to live on £500 a year."

"So it would with Miss Morland—not with you."

"Ah! That is all very well now. But I said something about it to father last week—not about you and *me*, you know, but about things *generally*—and he said that when people without money married *other* people without money, it was *madness*!" This rather involved sentence she gives forth with great solemnity.

"What a lot he said!" exclaims Lord Farnham, with affected admiration. "But, after all, it seems to me he didn't know what he was talking about! The real question is, Dorothy, whether you could be happy with me, even though we both were poor?"

"Oh, darling! what a horrid question. Don't you know that if I had ten thousand a year" (this seems to be the

utmost height of her ambition) "and *not* you, I should be the most wretched girl alive !"

"Well, you shall have more than that *with* me," cries he, folding his arms round her with a tender access of passion, and with his soul full of unspoken gratitude for this loving heart that has been given him to perfect his life.

Then he tells her all.

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